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MISS CRESPIGNY.

BY

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT,

Author of "HAWORTH'S," "THAT LASS O' LOWRIE'S," "SURLY TIM AND OTHER STORIES."

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Author's Note.

These love stories were written for and printed in "Peterson's Ladies' Magazine." Owing to the fact that this magazine was not copyrighted, a number of them have been issued in book-form without my consent, and representing the sketches to be my latest work.

If these youthful stories are to be read in book form, it is my desire that my friends should see the present edition, which I have revised for the purpose, and which is brought out by my own publishers.

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.

October, 1878.

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MISS CRESPIGNY.

CHAPTER I.

LISBETH.

"ANOTHER party?" said Mrs. Despard.

"Oh yes!" said Lisbeth. "And, of course, a little music, and then a little supper, and a little dancing, and all that sort of thing." And she frowned impatiently.

Mrs. Despard looked at her in some displeasure.

"You are in one of your humors, again, Lisbeth," she said, sharply.

"Why shouldn't I be?" answered Miss Crespigny, not a whit awed by her patroness. "People's humors are their privileges. I would not help mine if I could. I like them because they are my own private property, and no one else can claim them."

"I should hardly think any one would want to claim yours," said Mrs. Despard, dryly, but

at the same time regarding the girl with a sort of curiosity.

Lisbeth Crespigny shrugged her shoulders—those expressive shoulders of hers. A "peculiar girl," even the mildest of people called her, and as to her enemies, what did they not say of her? And her enemies were not in the minority. But "peculiar" was not an unnatural term to apply to her. She was "peculiar." Seeing her kneeling close before the fender this winter evening, one's first thought would have been that she stood apart from other girls. Her very type was her own, and no one had ever been heard to say of any other woman, "she is like Lisbeth Crespigny." She was rather small of figure, she had magnificent hair; her black brows and lashes were a wonder of beauty; her eyes were dark, mysterious, supercilious. She often frightened people. She frightened modest people with her nerve and coolness, bold people with her savage sarcasms, quiet people with her moods. She had alarmed Mrs. Despard, occasionally, when she had first come to live with her; but after three years, Mrs. Despard, who was strong of nerve herself, had become used to her caprices, though she had not got over being curious and interested in spite of herself.

She was a widow, this Mrs. Despard. She had been an ambitious nobody in her youth, and having had the luck to marry a reasonably rich man, her ambition had increased with her good fortune. She was keen, like Lisbeth, quick-witted and restless. She had no children, no cares, and thus having no particular object in life, formed one for herself in making herself pleasingly conspicuous in society.

It was her whim to be conspicuous; not in a vulgar way, however; she was far too clever for that. She wished to have a little social court of her own, and to reign supreme in it. It was not rich people she wanted at her entertainments, nor powerful people; it was talented people—people, shall it be said, who would admire her æsthetic *soirées*, and talk about her a little afterward, and feel the distinction of being invited to her house. And it was because Lisbeth Crespigny was "peculiar" that she had picked her up.

During a summer visit to a quaint, picturesque village on the Welsh coast, she had made the acquaintance of the owners of a cottage, whose picturesqueness had taken her fancy. Three elderly maiden ladies were the Misses Tregarthyn, and Lisbeth was their niece, and the apple of each gentle spinster's

eye. "Poor, dear Philip's daughter," and poor, dear Philip, who had been their half-brother, and the idol of their house, had gone abroad, and "seen the world," and, after marrying a French girl, who died young, had died himself, and left Lisbeth to them as a legacy. And then they had transferred their adoration and allegiance to Lisbeth, and Lisbeth, as her manner was, had accepted it as her right, and taken it rather coolly. Mrs. Despard had found her, at seventeen years old, a restless, lawless, ambitious young woman, a young woman when any other girl would have been almost a child. She found her shrewd, well-read, daring, and indifferent to audacity; tired of the picturesque little village, secretly a trifle tired of being idolized by the three spinsters, inwardly longing for the chance to try her mettle in the great world. Then, too, she had another reason for wanting to escape from the tame old life. In the dearth of excitement, she had been guilty of the weakness of drifting into what she now called an "absurd" flirtation, which had actually ended in an equally absurd engagement, and of which she now, not absurdly, as she thought, was tired.

"I scarcely know how it happened," she said, with cool scorn, to Mrs. Despard, when

they knew each other well enough to be confidential. "It was my fault, I suppose. If I had let him alone, he would have let me alone. I think I am possessed of a sort of devil, sometimes, when I have nothing to do. And he is such a boy," with a shrug, "though he is actually twenty-three. And then my aunts knew his mother when she was a girl. And so when he came to Pen'yllan, he must come here and stay with them, and they must encourage him to admire me. And I should like to know what woman is going to stand that." ("Woman, indeed!" thought Mrs. Despard.) "And then, of course, he has some sense of his own, or at least he has what will be sense some day. And he began to be rather entertaining after a while; and we boated, and walked, and talked, and read, and at last I was actually such a little fool as to let it end in a sort of promise, for which I was sorry the minute it was half made. If he had kept it to himself, it would not have been so bad; but, of course, being such a boyish animal, he must confide in Aunt Millicent, and Aunt Millicent must tell the others; and then they must all gush, and cry, and kiss me, as if everything was settled, and I was to be married in ten minutes, and bid them all an everlasting farewell in fifteen. So I began to

snub him that instant, and have snubbed him ever since, in hopes he would get as tired of me as I am of him. But he won't. He does nothing but talk rubbish, and say he will bear it for my sake. And the fact is, I am beginning to hate him ; and it serves me right."

She had always interested Mrs. Despard, but she interested her more than ever after this explanation. She positively fascinated her; and the end of it all was, that when the lady left Pen'yllan, she carried Lisbeth with her. The Misses Tregarthyn wept, and appealed, and only gave in, under protest, at last, because Lisbeth was stronger than the whole trio. She wanted to see the world, she said. Mrs. Despard was fond of her. She had money enough to make her so far independent, that she could return when the whim seized her; and she was tired of Pen'yllan. So, why should she not go? She might only stay a month, or a week, but, however that was, she had made up her mind to see life. While the four fought their battle out, Mrs. Despard looked on and smiled. She knew Lisbeth would win, and of course Lisbeth did. She packed her trunk, and went her way. But the night before her departure she had an interview with poor Hector Anstruthers, who came to the garden to speak to

her, his boyish face pale and haggard, his sea-blue eyes wild and hollow with despair; and, like the selfish, heartless, cool little wretch that she was, she put an end to his pleadings peremptorily.

"No!" she said. "I would rather you would not write to me. I want to be let alone; and it is because I want to be let alone that I am going away from Pen'yllan. I never promised one of the things you are always insisting that I promised. You may call me as many hard names as you like, but you can't deny that——"

"No!" burst forth the poor lad, in a frenzy. "You did not promise, but you let me understand——"

"Understand!" echoed his young tyrant. "I tried hard enough to make you understand that I wanted to be let alone. If you had been in your right senses, you might have seen what I meant. You have driven me almost out of my mind, and you must take the consequences." And then she turned away and left him, stunned and helpless, standing, watching her as she trailed over the grass between the lines of rose-bushes, the moonlight falling on her white dress and the little light-blue scarf she had thrown over her long, loose, dusky hair.

Three years ago all this had happened, and she was with Mrs. Despard still, though of course she had visited Pen'yllan occasionally. She had not tired her patroness, if patroness she could be called. She was not the sort of girl to tire people of their fancy for her. She was too clever, too cool, too well-poised. She interested Mrs. Despard as much to-day as she had done in the first week of their acquaintance. She was just as much of a study for her, even in her most vexatious moods.

"Have you a headache?" asked Mrs. Despard, after a while.

"No," answered Lisbeth.

"Have you had bad news from Pen'yllan?"

Lisbeth looked up, and answered Mrs. Despard, with a sharp curiousness.

"How did you know I had heard from Pen'yllan?" she demanded.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Despard, "I guessed so, from the fact that you seemed to have no other reason for being out of humor; and lately that has always been a sufficient one."

"I cannot see why it should be," said Lisbeth, tartly. "What can Pen'yllan have to do with my humor?"

"But you have had a letter?" said Mrs. Despard.

"Yes; from Aunt Clarissa. There is no bad news in it, however. Indeed, no news at all. How did I ever exist there?" her small face lowering.

"You would not like to go back?" suggested Mrs. Despard.

Lisbeth shrugged her shoulders.

"Would you like me to go back?" she questioned.

"I?" in some impatience. "You know, as well as I do, that I cannot do without you. You would never miss me, Lisbeth, as I should miss you. It is not your way to attach yourself to people."

"How do you know?" interposed Lisbeth. "What can you know about me? What can any one man or woman know of another? That is nonsense."

"It is the truth, nevertheless," was the reply. "Whom were you ever fond of? Were you fond of the Misses Tregarthyn, who adored you? Were you fond of that poor boy, who was so madly in love with you? Have you been fond of any of the men who made simpletons of themselves, because you had fine eyes, and a soft voice, and knew, better than any other woman in the world, how to manage them? No; you know you have not."

Lisbeth shrugged her shoulders again.

"Well, then, it is my way, I suppose," she commented; "and my ways are like my humors, as you call them. So, we may as well let them rest."

There was a pause after this; then Lisbeth rose, and going to the table, began to gather together the parcels she had left there when she returned from her shopping expedition.

"You have not seen the dress?" she said.

"No."

"It is a work of art. The pansies are as real as any that ever bloomed. They might have been just gathered. How well that woman understands her business!"

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER GENTLEMAN OF THE SAME NAME.

SHE went up stairs, after this, to her own room, a comfortable, luxurious little place, near Mrs. Despard's own apartment. A clear, bright fire burned in the grate, and her special sleepy-hollow chair was drawn before it; and when she had laid aside her hat, and disposed of her purchases, she came to this chair, and seated herself in it. Then she drew the Pen'yllan letter from her pocket, and laid it on her lap, and left it there, while she folded her hands, and leaned back, looking at the fire dreamily, and thinking to herself.

The truth is, that letter, that gentle, sweet-tempered, old-fashioned letter of Miss Clarissa's, stung the girl, worldly and selfish as she was. Three years ago she would not have cared much, but "seeing the world"—ah! the world had taught her a lesson. She had seen a great deal of this world, under Mrs. Despard's guidance. She had ripened marvelously; she had grown half a score of years older; she had learned to be bitter and clear-sighted; and now

a curious mental process was going on with her.

"We shall never cease to feel your absence, my dear," wrote Miss Tregarthyn. "Indeed, we sometimes say to each other, that we feel it more every day; but, at the same time, we cannot help seeing that our life is not the life one so young and attractive ought to live. It was not a congenial life for our poor dear old Philip, and how could it seem congenial to his daughter? And if, by a little sacrifice, we can make our dear Lisbeth happy, ought we not to be more than willing to submit to it? We are so proud of you, my dear, and it delights us so to hear that you are enjoying yourself, and being so much admired, that when we receive your letters, we forget everything else. Do you think you can spare us a week in the summer? If you can, you know how it will rejoice us to see you, even for that short time," etc., etc., through half a dozen pages.

And this letter now lay on Lisbeth's lap, as we have said, while she pondered over the contents moodily.

"I do not see," she said, at last, "I do not see what there is in me for people to be so fond of."

A loosened coil of her hair hung over her

shoulder and bosom, and she took this soft and thick black tress, and began to twist it round and round her slender mite of a wrist with a sort of vindictive force. "Where is the fascination in me?" she demanded, of the fire, one might have thought. "It is not for my amiability, it is not for my 'odd fine eyes, and odd soft voice,' as Mrs. Despard puts it, that those three women love me, and lay themselves under my feet. If they were men," with scorn, "one could understand it. But women! Is it because they are so much better than I am, that they cannot help loving something—even me? Yes it is!" defiantly. "Yes it is!"

She was angry, and all her anger was against herself, or at least against the fate which had made her what she was. Lisbeth knew herself better than other people knew her. It was a fate, she told herself. She had been born cold-blooded and immovable, and it was not to be helped. But she never defended herself thus, when others accused her; she would have scorned to do it. It was only against her own secret, restless, inner accusations that she deigned to defend herself. It was characteristic of her that she should brave the opinions of others, and feel rebellious under her own.

What Lisbeth Crespigny thought in secret of Lisbeth Crespigny must have its weight.

At last she remembered the dress lying upon the bed—the dress Lecomte had just sent home. She was passionately fond of dress, especially fond of a certain striking, yet artistic style of setting, for her own unusually effective face and figure. She turned now to this new dress, as a refuge from herself.

"I may as well put it on now," she said. "It is seven o'clock, and it is as well to give one's self plenty of time."

So she got up, and began her toilet leisurely. She found it by no means unpleasant to watch herself grow out of chrysalis form. She even found a keen pleasure in standing in the brilliant light before the mirror, working patiently at the soft, cloud-like masses of her hair, until she had wound and twisted it into some novel, graceful fancifulness. And yet even this scarcely arose from a vanity such as the vanity of other women.

She went down to the drawing-room, when she was dressed. She knew she was looking her best, without being told. The pale gray tissue, pale as a gray sea-mist, the golden-hearted, purple pansies with which it was lightly sown, and which were in her hair, and

on her bosom, and in her hands, suited her entirely. Her eyes, too, soft, dense, mysterious under their sweeping, straight black lashes—well, Lisbeth Crespigny's eyes, and no other creature's.

"A first glance would tell me who had designed that dress," said Mrs. Despard. "It is not Lecomte; it is your very self, in every touch and tint."

Lisbeth smiled, and looking down the length of the room, where she stood reflected in a mirror at the end of it, unfurled her fan, a gilded fan, thickly strewn with her purple pansies; but she made no reply.

A glass door, in the drawing-room, opened into a conservatory all aglow with light and bloom, and in this conservatory she was standing half an hour later, when the first arrivals came. The door, a double one, was wide open, and she, in the midst of the banks and tiers of flowers, was bending over a vase of heliotrope, singing a low snatch of song.

"The fairest rose blooms but a day,
The fairest Spring must end with May,
And you and I can only say,
Good-by, good-by, good-by!"

She just sang this much, and stopped. One

of the two people who had arrived was speaking to Mrs. Despard. She lifted her head, and listened. She could not see the speaker's face, because a tall, tropical-leaved lily interposed itself. But the voice startled her uncomfortably.

"Who is that man?" she said, to herself. "Who is that man?" And then, without waiting another moment, she left the heliotrope, and made her way to the glass door.

Mrs. Despard looked first, and saw her standing there.

"Ah, Lisbeth," she said, and then turned, with a little smile, toward the gentleman who stood nearest to her. "Here is an old friend," she added, as Lisbeth advanced. "You are indebted to Mr. Lyon for the pleasure of seeing Mr. Anstruthers again."

Lisbeth came forward, feeling as if she was on the verge of losing her amiable temper. What was Hector Anstruthers doing here? What did he want? Had he been insane enough to come with any absurd fancy that—that he could—that—. But her irritated hesitance carried her no farther than this. The young man met her halfway, with the greatest self-possession imaginable.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said,

holding out his hand frankly. "I was not aware, when Lyon brought me to his friend's, that I should find you here."

All this, as complacently, be it observed, as if he had been addressing any other woman in the world; as if that little affair of a few years ago had been too mere a bagatelle to be remembered; as if his boyish passion, and misery, and despair, had faded utterly out of his mind.

Mrs. Despard smiled again, and watched her young friend closely. But if Lisbeth was startled and annoyed by the too apparent change, she was too clever to betray herself. She was a sharp, secretive young person, and had her emotions well under control. She held out her hand with a smile of her own—a slow, well-bred, not too expressive affair, not an effusive affair, by any means.

"Delighted, I am sure?" she said. "I have just been reading a letter from Aunt Clarissa, and naturally it has prepared me to be doubly glad to see one of her special favorites."

After that the conversation became general, Anstruthers somehow managing to take the lead. Lisbeth opened her eyes. Was this the boy she had left in the moonlight at Pen'yllan? The young simpleton who had been at

her feet on the sands, spouting poetry, and adoring her, and making himself her grateful slave? The impetuous, tiresome lad, who had blushed, and raved, and sighed, and, in the end, had succeeded in wearying her so completely? Three years had made a difference. Here was a sublime young potentate, wondrously altered, and absolutely wondrously well-looking. The mustache she had secretly sneered at in its budding youth, was long, silken, brown; the slight, long figure had developed into the fairest of proportions; the guileless freshness of color had died away, and left an interesting, if rather significant pallor. Having been a boy so long, he seemed to have become a man all at once; and as he stood talking to Mrs. Despard, and occasionally turning to Lisbeth, his serenity of manner did him credit. Was it possible that he knew what to say? It appeared so. He did not blush; his hands and feet evidently did not incommode him. He was talking vivaciously, and with the air of a man of the world. He was making Mrs. Despard laugh, and there was every now and then a touch of daring, yet well-bred sarcasm in what he was saying. Bah! He was as much older as she herself was. And yet, incongruous as the

statement may appear, she hardly liked him any the better.

"How long," she asked, abruptly, of Bertie Lyon, "has Mr. Anstruthers been in London?" Lyon, that radiant young dandy, was almost guilty of staring at her amazedly.

"Beg pardon," he said. "Did you say 'how long!'"

"Yes."

The young man managed to recover himself. Perhaps, after all, she was as ignorant about Anstruthers as she seemed to be, and it was not one of her confounded significant speeches. They were nice enough people, of course, and Mrs. Despard was the sort of woman whose parties a fellow always liked to be invited to; but then they were not exactly in the set to which Anstruthers belonged, and of which he himself was a shining member.

"Well, you see," he said, "he has spent the greater part of his life in London; but it was not until about three years ago that he began to care much about society. He came into his money then, when young Scarsbrook shot himself accidentally, in Scotland, and he has lived pretty rapidly since," with an innocent faith in Miss Crespigny's ability to comprehend even a modest bit of slang. "He is a tremendously

talented fellow, Anstruthers — paints, and writes, and takes a turn at everything. He is the art-critic on the *Cynic;* and people talk about what he does, all the more because he has no need to do anything; and it makes him awfully popular."

Lisbeth laughed; a rather savage little laugh.

"What is it that amuses you?" asked Lyon. "Not Anstruthers, I hope."

"Oh, no!" answered the young lady. "Not this Anstruthers, but another gentleman of the same name, whom I knew a long time ago."

"A long time ago?" said the young man, gallantly, if not with wondrous sapience. "If it is a long time ago, I should think you must have been so young that your acquaintance would be hardly likely to make any impression upon you, ludicrous or otherwise." For he was one of the victims, too, and consequently liked to make even a stupidly polite speech.

CHAPTER III.

PANSIES FOR THOUGHT.

LISBETH gave him a sweeping little curtsy, and looked at him sweetly, with her immense, dense eyes.

"That was very nice, indeed, in you," she said, with a gravely obliged air. "Pray, take one of my pansies." And selecting one from her bouquet, she held it out to him, and Hector Anstruthers, chancing to glance toward them at the moment, had the pleasure of seeing the charming bit of by-play.

It was the misfortune of Miss Crespigny's admirers that they were rarely quite sure of her. She had an agreeable way of saying one thing, and meaning another; of speaking with the greatest gravity, and at the same time making her hearer feel extremely dubious and uncomfortable. She was a brilliant young lady, a sarcastic young lady, and this was her mode of dealing with young men and women who otherwise might have remained too well satisfied with themselves. Bertie Lyon felt him-

self somewhat at a loss before her, always. It was not easy to resist her, when she chose to be irresistible; but he invariably grew hot and cold over her "confounded significant speeches." And this was one of them. She was making a cut at him for his clumsy compliment, and yet he was compelled to accept her pansy, and fasten it on his coat, as if he was grateful.

Mr. Hector Anstruthers had been installed, by universal consent, that evening, as a sort of young lion, whose gentlemanly roar was worth hearing. Young ladies had heard of him from their brothers, and one or two had seen those lovely little pictures of his last season. Matrons had heard their husbands mention him as a remarkable young fellow, who had unexpectedly come into a large property, and yet wrote articles for the papers, and painted, when the mood seized him, for dear life. A really extraordinary young man, and very popular among highly desirable people. "Rather reckless," they would say, "perhaps, and something of a cynic, as these young swells are often apt to be; but, nevertheless, a fine fellow—a fine fellow!" And Anstruthers had condescended to make himself very agreeable to the young ladies to whom he was introduced; had danced

a little, had talked with great politeness to the elder matrons, and, in short, had rendered himself extremely popular. Indeed, he was so well employed, that, until the latter part of the evening, Lisbeth saw very little of him. Then he appeared suddenly to remember her existence, and dutifully made his way to her side, to ask for a dance, which invitation being rather indifferently accepted, they walked through a quadrille together.

"I hope," he said, with punctilious politeness, "that the Misses Tregarthyn are well."

"I am sorry to say," answered Lisbeth, staring at her *vis-à-vis*, "that I don't know."

"Then I must have mistaken you. I understood you to say that you had just received a letter from Miss Clarissa."

"It was not a mistake," returned Lisbeth. "I had just received one, but unfortunately they don't write about themselves. They write about me."

"Which must necessarily render their letters interesting," said Anstruthers.

Lisbeth barely deigned a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"Necessarily," she replied, "if one is so happily disposed as never to become tired of one's self."

"It would be rank heresy to suppose," said Anstruthers, "that any of Miss Crespigny's friends would allow it possible that any one could become tired of Miss Crespigny—even Miss Crespigny herself."

"This is the third figure, I believe," was Lisbeth's sole reply, and the music striking up again, they went on with their dancing.

"He supposes," said the young lady, scornfully, to herself, "that he can play the grand seigneur with me as he does with other women. I dare say he is congratulating himself on the prospect of making me feel sorry some day—me! Are men always simpletons? It really seems so. And it is the women whom we may blame for it. Bah! he was a great deal more worthy of respect when he was nothing but a tiresome, amiable young bore. I hate these simpletons who think they have seen the world, and used up their experience."

She was very hard upon him, as she was rather apt to be hard upon every one but Lisbeth Crespigny. And it is not improbable that she was all the more severe, because he reminded her unpleasantly of things she would have been by no means unwilling to forget. Was she so heartless as not to have a secret remembrance of the flush of his first young pas-

sion, of his innocent belief in her girlish goodness, of his generous eagerness to ignore all her selfish caprices, of his tender readiness to bear all her cruelty—for she had been cruel, and wantonly cruel, enough, God knows. Was she so utterly heartless as to have no memory of his suffering and struggles with his boyish pain, of his passionate, frantic appeal, when she had reached the climax of her selfishness and indifference to the wrong she might do? Surely, no woman could be so hard, and I will not say that she was, and that she was not inwardly stung this night by the thought that, if he had hardened and grown careless and unbelieving, the chances were that it was she herself who had helped to bring about the change for the worse.

The two young men, Lyon and his friend, spending that night together, had a little conversation on the subject of their entertainment, and it came to pass in this wise.

Accompanying Anstruthers to his chambers, Lyon, though by no means a sentimental individual, carried Miss Crespigny's gold and purple pansy in his button-hole, and finding it there when he changed his dress coat for one of his friend's dressing gowns, he took it out, and put it in a small slender vase upon the table.

Anstruthers had flung himself into an easy-chair, with his chibouque, and through the wreaths of smoke, ascending from the fragrant weed, he saw what the young man was doing.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded, abruptly.

"It is one of those things Miss Crespigny wore," was the modestly triumphant reply. "You saw them on her dress, and in her hair, and on her fan. This is a real one, though, out of her bouquet. I believe they call them heart's-ease."

"Heart's-ease be ——," began Anstruthers, roughly, but he checked himself in time. "She is the sort of a woman to wear heart's-ease!" he added, with a sardonic laugh. "She ought to wear heart's-ease, and violets, and lilies, and snowdrops, and wild roses in the bud," with a more bitter laugh for each flower he named. "Such fresh, innocent things suit women of her stamp."

"I say," said Lyon, staring at his sneering face, amazedly, "what is the matter? You talk as if you had a spite against her. What's up?"

Anstruther's sneer only seemed to deepen in its intensity.

"A spite!" he echoed. "What is the mat-

ter? Oh, nothing—nothing of any consequence. Only I wish she had given her heart's-ease to me, or I wish you would give it to me, that I might show you what I advise you to do with the pretty things such creatures give you. Toss it into the fire, old fellow, and let it scorch, and blacken, and writhe, as if it was a living thing in torment. Or fling it on the ground, and set your heel upon it, and grind it out of sight."

"I don't see what good that would do," said Lyon, coming to the mantelpiece, and taking down his meerschaum. "You are a queer fellow, Anstruthers. I did not think you knew the girl."

"I know her?" with a fresh sneer. "I know her well enough."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Lyon, suddenly, as if a thought had struck him. "Then she did mean something."

"She generally means something," returned the other. "Such women invariably do—they mean mischief."

"She generally does when she laughs in that way," Lyon proceeded, incautiously. "She is generally laughing at a man, instead of with him, as she pretends to be. And when she laughed, this evening, and looked in that odd

style at you, I thought there was something wrong."

Anstruthers turned white, the dead white of suppressed passion.

"Laugh!" he said. "She laughed?"

"You see," explained Lyon, "she had been asking about you; and when I finished telling her what I knew, she looked at you under her eyelashes, as you stood talking to Mrs. Despard, and then she laughed; and when I asked her if she was laughing at you, she said, 'Ah, no! Not at you, but at another gentleman of the same name, whom she had known a long time ago.'"

It was not the best thing for himself, that Hector Anstruthers could have heard. He had outlived his boyish passion, but he had not lived down the sting of it. Having had his first young faith broken, he had given faith up, as a poor mockery. He had grown cynical and sneering. Bah! Why should he cling to his old ideals of truth and purity? What need that he should strive to be worthy of visions such as they had proved themselves? What was truth after all? What was purity, in the end? What had either done for him, when he had striven after and believed in them?

The accidental death of his cousin had made

him a rich man, and he had given himself up to his own caprices. He had seen the world, and lived a lifetime during the last few years. What had there been to hold him back? Not love. He had done with that, he told himself. Not hope of any quiet bliss to come. If he ever married, he should marry some woman who knew what she was taking when she accepted what he had to offer.

And then he had gradually drifted into his artistic and literary pursuits, and his success had roused his vanity. He would be something more than the rest; and, incited by this noble motive, and his real love for the work, he had made himself something more. He had had no higher incentive than this vanity, and a fancy for popularity. It was not unpleasant to be pointed out as a genius—a man who, having no need to labor, had the whim to labor as hard when the mood seized, as the poorest Bohemian among them, and who would be paid for his work, too. "They will give me praise for nothing," he would say, sardonically. "They won't give me money for nothing. As long as they will pay me, my work means something. When it ceases to be worth a price, it is not worth my time."

The experience of this evening had been a

bad thing altogether for Anstruthers. It had roused in him much of sleeping evil. His meeting with Lisbeth Crespigny had been, as he told her, wholly unexpected. And because it had been unexpected, its effect had double force. He did not want to see her. If he had been aware of her presence in the house he was going to visit, he would have avoided it as he would have avoided the plague. The truth was, that in these days she had, in his mind, become the embodiment of all that was unnatural, and hard, and false. And meeting her suddenly, face to face, every bitter memory of her had come back to him with a fierce shock. When he had turned, as Mrs. Despard spoke, and had seen her standing in the doorway, framed in, as it were, with vines and flowers, and tropical plants, he had almost felt that he could turn on his heel and walk out of the room without a word of explanation. She would know well enough what it meant. Being the man he was, his eye had taken in at a glance every artistic effect about her; and she was artistic enough; for when Lisbeth Crespigny was not artistic she was nothing. He saw that the promise of her own undeveloped girlhood had fulfilled itself after its own rare, peculiar fashion, doubly and trebly. He saw

in her what other men seldom saw at first sight, but always learned afterward, and his sense of repulsion and anger against her was all the more intense. Having been such a girl, what might she not be as such a woman? Having borne such blossoms, what could the fruit be but hard and bitter at the core? Only his ever-ruling vanity saved him from greeting her with some insane, caustic speech. Vanity will serve both men and women a good turn, by chance, sometimes, and his saved him from making a blatant idiot of himself—barely saved him. And having got through this, it was not soothing to hear that she had stood, in her sly way, and looked at him under her eyelashes, and laughed. He knew how she would laugh. He had heard her laugh at people in that quiet fashion, when she was fifteen, and the sound had always hurt him, through its suggestion of some ungirlish satire he could not grasp, and which was not worthy of so perfect a being as he deemed her.

So, he could not help breaking out again in new fury, when Bertie Lyon explained himself. It did not matter so much, breaking out before Lyon. Men could keep each other's secrets. He flung his pipe aside with a rough word, and began to pace the room.

"There is more of devil than woman in her," he said. "There always was. I'd give a few years of my life," clenching his hand, "to be sure that she would find her match some day."

"I should think you would be match enough for her," remarked Lyon, astutely. "But what has she done to make *you* so savage? When were *you* in love with a woman?"

"Never!" bitterly. "I was in love with her, and she never belonged to the race, not even at fifteen years old. I was in love with her, and she has been the ruin of me."

"I should scarcely have thought it," answered Lyon. "You are a pretty respectable wreck, for your age."

The young man was not prone to heroics himself, and not seeing his friend indulge in them often, he did not regard them with enthusiasm.

This complacency checked Anstruthers. What a frantic fool he was, to let such a trifle upset his boasted cynicism? He flung out another short laugh of defiant self-ridicule. He came back to his chair as abruptly as he had left it.

"Bah!" he said. "So I am. You are a wise boy, Lyon, and I am glad you stopped me. I thought I had lived down all this sort

of nonsense, but—but I have seen that girl wear pansies before. Heart's-ease, by Jove! And it gave me a twinge to think of it. Keep that one in the glass over there; keep it as long as you choose, my boy. It will last as long as your fancy for her does, I wager. Women of the Crespigny stamp don't wear well. Here, hand me that bottle—Or stay! I'll ring for my man, and we will have some brandy and soda, to cool our heated fancies. We are too young to stay up so late; too young and innocent! We ought to have gone to bed long ago, like good boys."

CHAPTER IV.

A LUNCH PARTY.

THE studio of that popular and fortunate young man, Mr. Hector Anstruthers, was really a most gorgeous and artistic affair. It was beautifully furnished and wondrously fitted up, and displayed, in all its arrangements, the fact that its owner was a young man of refined and luxurious tastes, and was lucky enough to possess the means to gratify them to their utmost. People admired this studio, and talked about it almost as much as they talked about Anstruthers himself. Indeed, it had become a sort of fashion to visit it. The most exclusive of mammas, ladies who were so secure in their social thrones, that they were privileged to dictate to fashion, instead of being dictated to by that fickle goddess—ladies who made much of Anstruthers, and petted him, often stopped their carriages at his door on fine mornings, and descended therefrom with their marriageable girls, went up to the charming room, and loitered through half an hour, or even more, talking to the young potentate,

admiring his pictures, and picturesque odds and ends, and rarities, and making themselves very agreeable. He was an extravagant creature, and needed some one to control him, these ladies told him ; but really it was all very pretty, and exquisitely tasteful ; and, upon the whole, they could hardly blame him as much as it was their duty to do. Anstruthers received these delicate attentions with quite a grace.

He listened and smiled amiably, replying with friendly deprecation of their reproaches. Was he not paid a thousand-fold by their kind approval of his humble efforts? What more could he ask than that they should grace the little place with their presence, and condescend to admire his collection? Most men had their hobbies, and art was his—art and the artistic—a harmless, if extravagant one. And then he would beg his fair visitors and their escort to honor his small temple, by partaking of the luncheon his man would bring in. And then the little luncheon would appear, as if by magic—a marvelous collation, as much a work of art as everything else ; and this being set out upon some carven wonder of a table, the ladies would deign to partake, and would admire more than ever, until, in course of time, to visit Mr. Hector Anstruthers, among his pic-

tures, and carvings, and marbles, and be invited to enjoy his dandified little feasts, became the most fashionable thing the most exclusive of people could do. So it was by no means extraordinary that, one sunny morning in April, my lord, while chatting with his usual condescending amiability to one party of visitors, should receive another. There were three in this last party, an elderly beau, a young lady of uncertain age, and Mrs. Despard. Anstruthers, who was standing by the side of a pretty girl with bright eyes, started a little on the entrance of this lady, and the bright eyes observed it.

"Who is that?" asked their owner. "She is a very *distingué* sort of person." And then she smiled. It was quite certain that he could not be enamored of such mature charms as these, *distingué* though they might be.

"That is Mrs. Despard, Miss Esmond," answered Anstruthers. "Excuse me, one moment." And then he advanced to meet his guests, with the cordiality of the most graceful of hosts.

This was indeed a pleasure, he said, blandly. He had been half afraid that Mrs. Despard had forgotten her kind promise.

That lady shook hands with him in a most friendly manner. She rather shared the uni-

versal tendency people had to admire the young man. Were not all young men extravagant? And at least this one had money enough to afford to be extravagant honestly, and attractions enough to render even conceit a legitimate article.

"You must thank Mr. Estabrook and his sister for bringing me," she said. "They have been before and knew the way. We met them as they were coming here, and they asked us to come with them. Lisbeth would not get out of the carriage. She was either lazy or ill-humored. She was driven round to the library, and is to call for us in half an hour.

Her eyes twinkled a little as she told him this. As I have said before, Lisbeth always interested her, and she was interested now in her mode of managing this old love affair. It was so plain that it rasped her to be brought in contact with him and that she would have preferred very much to keep out of his way, that the fact of her being thrown in his path against her will could not fail to have its spice, and afford Mrs. Despard a little malicious amusement. In secret, she was obliged to confess that, ill-natured as it seemed, she would not have been very sorry to see Lisbeth at bay. Of Anstruthers' sentiments she was not quite sure,

as yet, but she was very sure of Lisbeth's. Lisbeth knew that she had acted atrociously in the past, and hating herself in private for her weak wickedness, hated Anstruthers too for his share in it. It was not Lisbeth's way to be either very just or very generous. All her pangs of self-reproach were secret ones, of which she had taught herself to be ashamed, and which she would have died rather than confess. She let her caprices rule her wholly, and did her best to make them rule other people. If she was angry, she made vicious speeches; if she was pleased, she behaved like an angel, or an angelic creature without a fault. She did not care enough for other people to mold her moods to their taste. The person of most consequence to her was Lisbeth Crespigny.

Mrs. Despard found her visit to her young friend's studio very entertaining. She saw things to admire, and things to be amused at. She discovered that his own efforts were really worth looking at, and that the fixtures he had collected were both valuable and exquisite. He had bought no costly lots of ugliness, he had bought beauty. As to the appurtenances of the room, a woman could not have chosen them better—most women would not have chosen them so well. Indeed, a touch of ef-

feminate fancifulness in the general arrangement of things made her smile more than once. He had arranged a sort of miniature conservatory in a wide, deep bay-window, filled it with tiers of flowers growing in fanciful vases, and hanging baskets full of delicate, long vines, and bright bloom.

"What a dandy we are!" she said, smiling, when she drew aside the sweeping lace curtain which cut this pretty corner off from the rest of the apartment. "And what fine tastes we display!"

Anstruthers blushed a little. He had accompanied her on her tour of exploration, and had been secretly flattered by her evident admiration and surprise.

"Is that a compliment, or is it not?" he answered. "I like to hear that I have fine taste, but I don't like to be called a dandy."

"Isn't it a trifle dandified to know how to do all these things so well?" she asked. "It is a man's province to be clumsy and ignorant about the small graces."

"Isn't it better than doing them ill?" he said. "Pray let me give you two or three pale rosebuds and a few sweet violets."

"If you bribe me with violets and rosebuds, I shall say it is better that you should be

æsthetic enough to care to cultivate them, than that I should not have the pleasure of receiving them as a gift. It is very pretty of you to do such things."

There was no denying that they had become excellent friends. There were not many people to whom his lordship would have offered his rosebuds and violets, but for some reason or other he had taken a sudden fancy to Mrs. Despard, and was anxious to show himself to advantage. He was even ready to answer her questions, and once or twice they were somewhat close ones, it must be confessed.

"Tell me something about that nice girl," she said, glancing at Miss Esmond, who was talking to the rest of the party. "What a pretty creature she is, and how bright her eyes and her color are! There are very few girls who look like that in these days."

"Very few," answered Anstruthers. "That nice girl is Miss Georgie Esmond, and she is one of the few really nice girls who have the luck to take public fancy by storm, as they ought to. She has not been 'out' long, and she is considered a belle and a beauty. And yet I assure you, Mrs. Despard, that I have seen that girl playing with a troop of little

brothers and sisters, as if she was enjoying herself, helping a snuffy old French governess to correct exercises, and bringing a light for the old colonel's pipe, as if she had never seen a ball-room in her life."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Despard, "then I suppose you have seen her in the bosom of her family," a trifle slyly.

"I know them very well," replied the young man, with a grave air. "I have known Georgie Esmond since she wore pinafores. My poor cousin, who died, has played blindman's buff with us at Scarsbrook Park, when we were children, many a time. The fact is, I believe we are distant relations."

"I congratulate you on the distance of the relationship," said Mrs. Despard. "She is a fresh, bright, charming girl."

"She is a good girl," said Anstruthers. "Congratulate her on that, and congratulate her father, and her mother, and her brothers and sisters, and the snuffy old governess, whose life she tries to make less of a burden to her."

It was at this moment that the carriage in which Lisbeth had driven away returned. It drove by the window, and drew up at the door, and Mrs. Despard saw her young friend's face alter its expression when he caught sight of it,

with its prancing bays and faultless accompaniments, and Lisbeth Crespigny leaning back upon the dove-colored cushions, with a book in her little dove-colored hand. She saw Mrs. Despard among the flowers, but did not see her companion; and being in an amiable humor, she gave her a smile and a nice little gesture of greeting. Her eyes looked like midnight in the sunshine, and with a marvel of a cream-colored rose in her hat, and in perfect toilet, she was like a bit of a picture, dark, and delicate, and fine; she struck Anstruthers in an instant, just as anything else artistic would have struck him, and held his attention.

"I wonder if she would come up," Mrs. Despard said. "I wish she would. She ought to see this. It would suit her exactly."

"Allow me to go down and ask her if she will do us the honor," said Anstruthers. "Colonel Esmond and his daughter have promised to take luncheon, and I was in hopes that I could persuade your party to join us. It will be brought on almost immediately."

"That is as novel as the rest," said Mrs. Despard, by no means displeased. "However, if you can induce Lisbeth to come up, I am not sure that I shall refuse."

"I wonder what he will say to her," was her

mental comment, when he left the room, and she looked out of her window with no small degree of interest.

She saw him standing upon the pavement, by the carriage, a moment or so later, his face slightly upturned, as he spoke to the girl, the spring wind playing softly with his loose, fair hair, and the spring sunshine brightening it; and something in his manner, she scarcely knew what, brought back to her a sudden memory of the frank, boyish young fellow he had been when Lisbeth first amused herself, with her cool contempt for his youth and impetuousness, at Pen'yllan. And just as suddenly it occurred to her, what a wide difference she found in him now. How ready he was to say caustic things, to take worldly views, and indulge in worldly sneers; and she recollected the stories she had drifted upon; stories which proved him a life's journey from the boy whose record had been pure, whose heart had been fresh, whose greatest transgression might have been easily forgiven; and remembering all this, she felt a sharp anger against Lisbeth, an anger sharper than she had ever felt toward her in the whole of her experience.

When Anstruthers appeared upon the pavement, and advanced toward the carriage side,

Lisbeth turned toward him with a feeling of no slight displeasure. Since she had made an effort to keep out of his way, must he follow her up?

"Is not Mrs. Despard coming?" she asked, somewhat abruptly.

"Mrs. Despard was so kind as to say, that if I could induce you to leave the carriage and join our little party, she would not refuse to take luncheon with us." And then he stood and waited for her reply.

"I was not aware that she thought of staying," said Lisbeth. "If I had known——"

Then she checked herself. "If I refuse," she said, in secret, "he will think I am afraid of him." And she regarded him keenly. But he was quite immovable, and merely appeared politely interested.

"If you will be so good as to let me help you down," he said, opening the low door himself, and extending his hand courteously, "we shall be delighted to have such an addition to our number," he added.

"You are very kind," answered Lisbeth, rising. He should not think his presence could influence her one way or the other. She made up her mind to face this position, since it was unavoidable, as if it had been the most

ordinary one in the world. She entered the room up stairs as if she had expected to lunch there. Miss Esmond, who was always good-naturedly ready to be enthusiastic, turned to look at her with a smile of pleasure.

"What an unusual type!" she said, to her father. "Do look, papa! She is actually exquisite!" And being introduced to her, her frank, bright eyes became brighter than ever. She was one of those lovable, trusting young creatures, who are ready to fall in love with pleasant people or objects on the shortest notice; and she was captivated at once by Lisbeth's friendly air. Her age and Lisbeth's were about the same, but by nature and experience they were very wide apart, Miss Crespigny being very much the older and more worldly-wise of the two. If it had come to a matter of combat between them, Miss Georgie would have had no chance whatever.

CHAPTER V.

GEORGIE ESMOND.

IT suited Lisbeth to be charming this morning, and she was really very agreeable indeed. She knew enough of art to appear to advantage among pictures, and she had, withal, a certain demure and modest way of admitting her ignorance, which was by no means unattractive. She was bright, amiable, and, as it seemed, in the best of spirits. She made friends with Miss Georgie, and delighted Colonel Esmond; she propitiated Miss Estabrook, and rendered that inflammable elderly beau, her brother, supremely happy by her friendly condescension; she treated Anstruthers as if there had been no other event in their two lives but this one morning and this one nice little party. She made the luncheon even more entertaining than such small feasts usually were; in short, she was Lisbeth Crespigny at her best, her spiciest, and in her most engaging mood.

"Oh!" said that open-hearted Georgie, when she shook hands with her as they parted—"Oh, I have enjoyed myself so much! I am so glad

to have met you. I hope we shall see each other again. Please ask me to call, Mrs. Despard," laughing prettily. "I should like it so much. I do so hate to lose people whom I like."

"Does that mean that you are so good as to like me a little?" said Lisbeth, in her sweetest tone, wondering, at the same time, how on earth the girl could have lived so long, and yet have retained that innocent, believing air and impulsive way. "I hope it does."

Georgie quite blushed with innocent fervor.

"Indeed it does," she answered. "I should not say it, if it did not. And I am sure that, if I see you more, I shall like you better and better. It is so delightful to meet somebody one is sure one can be fond of."

It was an odd thing, but as Lisbeth looked at her for a moment, she positively felt that she blushed faintly herself, blushed with a sense of being a trifle ashamed of Lisbeth Crespigny. It would be dreadful to have such a girl as this find her out; see her just as she was; read her record just as the past had left it. She was half inclined to put such a thing beyond the pale of possibility by drawing back.

"I want mamma to know you," said Georgie. "Mamma is so fond of clever people, that it

makes me wish, often enough, that I was not such an ordinary sort of girl."

"We shall be delighted to see you, my dear," said Mrs. Despard. "You may be sure of that. Come as soon, and as often as possible."

And so the matter was decided, and Lisbeth had not the power to draw back, if she had determined to do so.

"You must have known Miss Crespigny quite a long time," Georgie Esmond said, cheerfully, to Anstruthers, before she went away with her father. "Mrs. Despard said something about your having met her at that little Welsh place, Pen'yllan wasn't it? And you haven't been at Pen'yllan to stay for two or three years."

"You ought not to have kept such a charming creature to yourself for three years, my boy," said the old colonel.

"I should think not, indeed," chimed in Miss Georgie. "It was selfish, and we are never selfish with him, are we, papa? We show him all our nice people, don't we?"

"But," said Anstruthers, "I have not seen Miss Crespigny once during the three years. After leaving Pen'yllan, we lost sight of each other, somehow or other, and did not meet again until a short time ago, and then it was quite by accident."

"It was very careless of you to lose her then," protested Miss Georgie. "I would not have lost her for the world. Gentlemen are so cold in their friendships. I don't believe you ever really loved any of your friends in your life, Mr. Hector."

Anstruthers smiled a satirical smile.

"Ought I to have loved Miss Crespigny?" he demanded. "Ought I to begin to love her now? If you think it is my duty, I will begin to do it at once, Georgie."

The girl shook her pretty head reproachfully.

"Oh!" she said, "that is always the way you talk, you grand young gentlemen. It is the fashion to be sarcastic, and not to admire anybody very much, or anything but yourselves," saucily. "And you would sneer at your best friends rather than not be in the fashion. I am sure I don't know what the world is coming to."

"Who is sarcastic now, I should like to know?" said Anstruthers. "I think it is Miss Georgie Esmond, who out-Herods Herod. Admire ourselves, indeed! We only do what we are taught to do. What women themselves teach us——"

"What!" exclaimed Georgie. "Do we

teach you to admire yourselves, and nothing else?"

"No," was his answer. "You do not teach us that, but you do worse. Not you, my kind, honest Georgie, but women who would have us believe they are as honest and tender. They teach us that if we cling to our first beliefs, we are fools, and deserve to be laughed at; they teach us to sneer, and then scold us prettily for sneering; they leave us nothing to believe in, and then make sad, poetic speeches about our want of faith. There are men in the world for whom it would have been better if they had never seen a woman."

Georgie Esmond's eyes opened wider and wider. She did not understand such bitterness. She was a simple, healthful-minded girl, and had seen very little of the world but its pleasant side.

"Why!" she said, "this is dreadful. And you say it as if you actually meant it. I shall have to talk to mamma about you, Hector. Such cases as yours are too much for me to deal with. What good is all your money, and your genius, and your popularity, and—and good looks?" making a charming, mischievous bow. "What pleasure can you derive from your pretty rooms, and lovely pictures, and

fine articles of *vertu*, if you have such wicked thoughts as those? Somebody ought to take your things from you, as we do Harry's toys, when he is willful; and they ought to be locked up in a cupboard, until you are in a frame of mind to enjoy them."

Anstruthers looked at her sweet, bright face with a kind of sad admiration. Why had he not fallen in love with this girl, instead of with the other? It was a hard fate which had led or driven him. What a different man he might have been, if, three years ago, Georgie Esmond had stood in Lisbeth Crespigny's place!

"You don't quite understand, Georgie," he said, in a low, rather tender tone. "You are too good and kind, my dear, to quite comprehend what makes people hard, and bitter, and old before their time."

And Colonel Esmond coming into the room to take her away, at this moment, he gave her nice little hand the ghost of an affectionate pressure, when she offered it to him in farewell.

And while Mr. Hector Anstruthers was railing, in this exalted strain, at the falseness of womankind, the fair cause of his heresy was driving home in a rather unpleasant frame of mind. It is never pleasant to find that one has lost power, and it was a specially galling

thing to Lisbeth Crespigny to find herself at any time losing influence of any kind. She did not find it agreeable to confront the fact that one of her slaves had purchased his freedom, with his experience. Petty as the emotion was, she had felt something akin to anger this morning, when she had been compelled to acknowledge, as once or twice she had been, that her whilom victim could address her calmly, meet her glance with polite indifference, regard her, upon the whole, as he would have regarded any far less accomplished woman.

"Less than four years ago," she said to herself, with scorn, "if I had trampled upon him, he would have kissed my feet. To-day, he only sees in me an unpleasant young woman, whom he overrated, and accordingly cherishes a grudge against. I have no doubt he looked at that pretty, fresh, Esmond girl, as we sat together, and drew invidious comparisons between us."

Let us give her credit for one thing, however. She felt no anger against the girl, who she fancied had taken her place. Somehow Georgie Esmond, with her bright eyes, and her roses, and her ready good-nature, had found a soft spot in Lisbeth's rather hard heart. Miss

Crespigny could not have explained why it was, but she had taken a fancy to Georgie Esmond. She liked her, and she wanted the feeling to be a mutual one. She would have experienced something very like a pang, even thus early in their acquaintance, if she had thought that the sweet, honest young creature would ever see her with Hector Anstruthers' eyes.

"Men are always disproportionately bitter," she said, to herself. "It is their way to make themselves heard when they are hurt. They seem to have a kind of pride in their pain. Any ordinarily clever woman could see that my lord of the studio had a grievance."

"Lisbeth," said Mrs. Despard, breaking in upon her reverie, "isn't it rather astonishing how that boy has improved?"

"He has improved," said Lisbeth, "because he has ceased to be a boy. He is a man in these days."

"And a very personable and entertaining man, I must say," returned Mrs. Despard, nodding her head, in approval of him. "He is positively handsome. And that luncheon was a very pretty, graceful affair, and quite unique. I shall pay him a visit again one of these fine days."

Being thus installed as one of Mrs. Despard's favorites, it was not at all singular that they should see a great deal of the young gentleman. And they did see him pretty often. Gradually he forgot his objection to meeting Lisbeth, and rather sneered in secret at the violence of that first shock of repulsion. It was all over, now, he said, and why should such a woman trouble him? Indeed, what greater proof of his security could he give himself than the fact that he could meet her almost daily, and still feel indifferent? It must be confessed that he rather prided himself upon his indifference. He was drawn also into greater familiarity with the household through Georgie Esmond. For, in expressing her wish to make friends with Lisbeth, Georgie had been sincere, as was her habit. A very short time after the luncheon her first visit was made, and the first visit was the harbinger of many others. "Mamma," who was her daughter's chief admiration, came with her, and "mamma" was as much charmed, in her way, as Georgie had been in hers. It was impossible for Lisbeth to help pleasing people when she was in the right mood; and Mrs. Esmond and Georgie invariably put her in the right mood. She could not help showing her best side to these two sweet natures.

CHAPTER VI.

A SONG.

THUS a friendship arose which, in the course of time, became a very close one. Colonel Esmond's house was luxurious and pleasant, and everybody's heart opened to a favorite of Georgie's. Accordingly, Lisbeth's niche in the family was soon found. It was rather agreeable to go among people who admired and were ready to love her, so she went pretty often. In fact, Georgie kept firm hold upon her. There appeared always some reason why it was specially necessary that Lisbeth should be with her. She had visitors, or she was alone and wanted company ; she had some new music and wanted Lisbeth's help, or she had found some old songs Lisbeth must try—Lisbeth, whose voice was so exquisite. Indeed, it was Lisbeth, Lisbeth, Lisbeth, from week to week, until more than one of Miss Esmond's admirers wished that there had been no such person as Miss Crespigny in the world. As Anstruthers had said, Miss Georgie Esmond was quite a belle, in this the first year of her

reign, and if she had been so inclined, it was generally believed that she might have achieved some very brilliant social triumphs, indeed. But I am afraid that she had the bad taste not to aspire as she might have done.

"I don't want to be uncharitable," she had said, innocently, to her friend. "And I don't in the least believe the things people often say about society—the things Hector says, for instance; but really, Lisbeth, I have sometimes thought that the life behind all the glare and glitter was just the least bit stupid and hollow. I know I should get dreadfully tired of it, if I had nothing else to satisfy me; no real home-life, and no true, single-hearted, close friends to love, like you and mamma."

It made Lisbeth wince, this pretty speech. Georgie Esmond often made her wince.

And Mr. Hector Anstruthers discovered this fact before any great length of time had passed, and the discovery awakened in him divers new sensations.

He had looked on at the growing friendship with a secret sneer; but the sneer was not at Georgie. Honestly, he liked the girl something the better for her affectionate credulity; nothing could contaminate her, not even Lisbeth Crespigny. But sometimes, just now and then,

he found it a trifle difficult to control himself, and resist the impulse to be openly sarcastic.

He encountered this difficulty in special force one evening about a month after the studio luncheon. The girls had spent the afternoon together, and, dinner being over, Lisbeth was singing one of Georgie's favorite songs. It was a love song, too, for though Miss Georgie had as yet had no practical experience in the matter of love, she had some very pretty ideas of that tender passion, and was very fond of love songs, and poems, and love stories, such as touched her heart, and caused her to shed a few gentle tears. And this song was a very pretty one, indeed. "All for love, and the world well lost," was the burden of its guileless refrain. All for love, love which is always true, and always tender, and never deceives us. What is the world, it demanded, what is life, what rest can we find if we have not love? The world is our garden, and love is the queen of roses, its fairest bloom. Let us gather what flowers we may, but, oh, let us gather the rose first, and tend it most delicately. It will give its higher beauty to our lives; it will make us more fit for heaven itself; it will shame our selfishness, and help us to forget our sordid longings. All for love, and the

world well lost. And so on, through three or four verses, with a very sweet accompaniment, which Georgie played with great taste.

And Lisbeth was singing, and, as she had a trick of doing, was quite forgetting herself. And her exquisite, full-toned voice rose and fell with a wondrous fervor, and her immense dark eyes glared, and her small pale face glowed, and a little pathetic shadow seemed to rest upon her. So well did she sing, indeed, that one might have fancied that she had done nothing, all her life, but sing just such sweetly sentimental songs, and believe every word of them implicitly; and when she had finished, Georgie's eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, Lisbeth!" she cried, looking up at her affectionately, "you make everything sound so beautiful and—and true. I could never, never sing in that way. It must be because you can feel beautiful, tender things so deeply, so much more deeply than other people do."

Lisbeth awoke from her dream suddenly. Hector Anstruthers, who had been standing at the other side of the piano, looked at her with a significance which would have roused her at any time. Their eyes met, and both pair flashed; his with the very intensity of contempt; hers with defiance.

"My dear Georgie," he said, "I admire your enthusiasm, but scarcely think you quite understand Miss Crespigny. She is one of those fortunate people who cannot help doing things well. It is a habit she has acquired. No sentiment would suffer in her hands, even a sentiment quite opposite to the one she has just iilustrated the force of so artistically."

Georgie looked a little amazed. She did not liked to be chilled when all her gentle emotions were in full play; and, apart from this, did not such a speech sound as if it suggested a doubt of the sincerity of her beloved Lisbeth?

"People cannot teach themselves to be innocent and loving," she said, almost indignantly. "At least, they cannot be artistically loving and innocent. You cannot make art of truth and faith, and you cannot be generous and kind through nothing but habit. Your heart must be good before you can be good yourself. At least, that is my belief, and I would rather have my beliefs than your cynicisms; and so would Lisbeth, I am sure, even if they are not so brilliant and popular. You are too sarcastic, sir, and you have quite spoiled our pretty song."

"I did not mean to spoil it," he answered. "Forgive me, I beg," with a satirical bow,

"and pray favor me with another, that I may learn to believe. Perhaps I shall. I am inclined to think Miss Crespigny could convince a man of anything."

"You don't deserve another," said Georgie. "Does he, Lisbeth?"

"Hardly," said Lisbeth, who was turning over some music, with an indifferent face. But she sang again nevertheless, and quite as well as she had done before, though it must be admitted that she influenced Georgie to a choice of songs of a less Arcadian nature.

The following morning Anstruthers called to see Mrs. Despard, and found that lady absent, and Miss Crespigny in the drawing-room. Consequently, it fell to Miss Crespigny's lot to entertain him during his brief visit. He made it as brief as possible; but when he rose to take his leave, to his surprise Lisbeth detained him.

"There is something I should like to say to you," she began, after she had risen with him.

He paused, hat in hand.

"It is about Georgie—Miss Esmond," she added. "You were very kind to speak to her of me as you did last night. It was very generous. I feel that I ought to thank you for trying to

make her despise me." And her eyes flashed with an expression not easy to face.

"I ask pardon," he returned, loftily. "If I had understood that your friendship was of such a nature——"

"If its object had been a man, instead of an innocent girl, you would have understood easily enough, I have no doubt," she interposed, angrily.

He bowed, with the suspicion of a sneer upon his face.

"Perhaps," he answered.

"Thank you," said she. "However, since you need the matter explained, I will explain it. I am fond of Georgie Esmond, and she is fond of me, and I do not choose to lose her affection; so I must resort to the poor expedient of asking you to deny yourself the gratification of treating me contemptuously in her presence. Say what you please when we are alone, as we are sometimes forced to be; but when we are with your cousin, be good enough to remember that she is my friend, and trusts me."

It was so like the girl Lisbeth, this daring, summary course, this confronting and settling the matter at once, without the least sign of hesitation or reluctance, that he began to feel very uncomfortable. Had he really behaved

himself so badly, indeed? Was it possible that he had allowed himself to appear such a rampant brute as her words implied? He, who so prided himself upon his thoroughbred impassibility?

"I treat you contemptuously!" he exclaimed.

"It is not you I care for," she answered him. "It is Georgie Esmond."

He had no resource left but to accept his position, the very humiliating position of a man whose apologies, if he offered any, would be coolly set aside, whose humiliation was of no consequence, and who was expected to receive punishment, like a culprit whose sensations were not for a moment to be regarded.

He left the house feeling angry and helpless, and returning to his chambers, wrote a stinging criticism of a new book. Poor Blanke, who had written the book, received the benefit of the sentiments Miss Crespigny had roused.

On her part, Lisbeth resorted to one of her "humors," to use Mrs. Despard's expression. She was out of patience with herself. She had lost her temper almost as soon as she had spoken her first words; and she had been so sure of perfect self-control before she began. That was her secret irritant. Why could she not have managed it better? It was not usual

with her to give way when she was sure of herself.

"Somebody has been here," said Mrs. Despard, when she came in, and found her sitting alone with her sewing. "Some one you do not like, or some one who has said something awkward or unpleasant to you."

"Hector Anstruthers has been here," was Lisbeth's answer, but she deigned no further explanation, and did not even lift her eyes as she spoke.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW EXPERIENCE.

THE next time that Georgie found herself alone with Mr. Anstruthers, she read him a very severe little lecture on the subject of his shortcomings.

"I knew that you liked to be satirical, and make fine, cutting speeches," she said, with the prettiest indignation; "but I did not think you would have gone so far as to be openly rude, and to Lisbeth, of all people! Lisbeth, who is so good, and unselfish, and kind, and who is my dearest friend."

Hector Anstruthers looked at her sweet face almost mournfully. "Is she good, and unselfish, and kind?" he said. But the question was not a satire. He only asked it in a tender wonder at the girl's innocent faith.

"There is no one like her. No one so good, unless it is mamma herself," exclaimed Miss Georgie, with warmth.

"But Lisbeth's is not a common surface goodness, and I suppose that is the reason that you cannot see it. You, too, who are so far-

sighted and clever. I, for one, am glad I am not a genius, if to be a genius one must be blind to everything but the failings of one's friends. Ah, Hector!" a sudden pity kindling in her gentle breast, as she met his eyes, "Ah, Hector, people often envy you, and call you fortunate, but there are times when I am sorry for you—sorry from my heart."

"Georgie," answered the young man, not quite able to control a tremor in his voice, "there are more times than you dream of, when I am sorry for myself."

"Sorry for yourself?" said Georgie, softening at once. "Then you must be more unhappy than I thought. To be sorry for one's self, one must be unhappy indeed. But why is it? Why should you be unhappy, after all? Why should you be cynical and unbelieving, Hector? The world has been very good to you, or, as I think we ought to say, God has been very good to you. What have you not got, that you can want? What is there that you lack? Not money, not health, not friends. Isn't it a little ungrateful to insist on being wretched, when you have so much?"

"Yes," answered Anstruthers, gloomily. "It is very ungrateful, indeed."

"Ungrateful? I should think it was," re-

turned Georgie, with her favorite dubious shake of the head. "Ah, poor fellow! I am afraid it is a little misfortune that you need, and I am very sorry to see it."

It was no marvel that Georgie Esmond was popular. She was one of those charming girls who invariably have a good effect upon people. She was so good herself, so innocent, so honest, so trustful, that she actually seemed to create a sweeter atmosphere wherever she went. The worst of men, while listening to her gentle, bright speeches, felt that the world was not so bad after all, and that there was still sweetness and purity left, to render sin the more shameful by their white contrast. "A fellow wants to forget his worst side, when he is with her," said one. "She makes a man feel that he would like to hide his shadinesses even from himself." Her effect upon Hector Anstruthers was a curious, and rather a dangerous one. She made him ashamed of himself, too, and she filled his heart with a tender longing and regret. Had it not been for his experience with Lisbeth, he would have loved the girl passionately. As it was, his affection for her would never be more than a brotherly, though intensely admiring one. He was constantly wishing that Fate had given Georgie to him;

Georgie, who seemed to him the purest and loveliest of young home goddesses; Georgie, who would have made his life happy, and pure, and peaceful. If it had only been Georgie instead of Lisbeth. But it had been Lisbeth, and his altar-fires had burned out, and left to him nothing but a waste of cold, gray ashes. And yet, knowing this, he could not quite give Georgie up. The mere sight of her fresh, bright-eyed face was a help to him, and the sound of her voice a balm. He grew fonder of her every day, in his way. Her kindly, little girlish homilies touched and warmed him. As Lisbeth had made him worse, so Georgie Esmond made him better. But the danger! The danger was not for himself, it was for Georgie.

The day was slowly dawning when the girl's innocent friendship and admiration for him would become something else. When she began to pity him, she began to tread on unsafe ground. She had lived through no miserable experience; she had felt no desolating passion; her heart was all untried, and his evident affection stirred it softly, even before she understood her own feelings. She thought her budding love was pity, and her tenderness sympathy. He had gone wrong, poor fellow, somehow, and she was sorry for him.

"I am sure he does not mean the hard things he sometimes says," she said to Lisbeth. "I think that satirical way of speaking is more a bad habit than anything else. Mamma thinks so, too, but," with a little guileless blush, "we are both so fond of him, that we cannot help being sorry that he has fallen into it."

"It is a sort of fashion in these days," returned Lisbeth, and she longed to add a scorching little sneer to the brief comment, but she restrained it for Georgie's sake.

Positively such a thing had become possible. She, who had never restrained her impulses before, had gradually learned to control them for this simple girl's sake. On the one or two occasions, early in their acquaintance, when she had let her evil spirit get the better of her, the sudden pain and wonder in Georgie's face had stung her so quickly, that she had resolved to hide her iniquities, at least in her presence. Sometimes she had even wished that she had been softer at heart and less selfish. It was so unpleasant to see herself just as she was, when she breathed that sweet atmosphere of which I have spoken. Georgie Esmond caused her to lose patience with Lisbeth Crespigny, upon more than one occasion.

"I am a hypocrite," she said to herself. "If

she knew me as I am, what would she think of me? What would Mrs. Esmond say if she knew how cavalierly her 'dear Lisbeth' had treated those three loving old souls at Pen'yllan? I am gaining everything on false pretenses." And one night, as she sat combing her hair before her mirror, she added, fiercely, "I am false and selfish all through; and I believe they are teaching me to be ashamed of myself."

The fact was, these two sweet women, this sweet mother and daughter, were teaching her to be ashamed of herself. She quite writhed under her conviction, for she felt herself convicted. Her self-love was wounded, but the day came when that perfect, obstinate self-confidence, which was her chief characteristic, was not a little shaken.

"I should like to be a better woman," she would say, in a kind of stubborn anger. "It has actually come to this, that I would be a better woman, if I could, but I cannot. It is not in me. I was not born to be a good woman."

The more she saw of the Esmonds, the more she learned. The household was such a pleasant one, and was so full of the grace of home and kindly affection. How proud the good

old colonel was of his pretty daughter. How he enjoyed her triumphs, and approved of the taste of her many admirers. How delighted he was to escort her to evening parties, or to the grandest of balls, and to spend the night in watching her dance, and smile, and hold her gay little court, entirely ignoring the fact that his gout was apt to be troublesome, when he wore tight boots instead of his huge slippers. It was quite enough for him that his girl was enjoying herself, and that people were admiring her grace, and freshness, and bloom. How fond the half-dozen small brothers and sisters were of Georgie! and what a comfort and pleasure the girl was to her mother! It was an education to Lisbeth Crespigny to see them all together. It even seemed that in time she fell somewhat into Georgie's own way of caring for other people. How could she help caring for the kind hearts that beat so warmly toward her. Then, through acquiring, as it were, a habit of graciousness, she remembered things she had almost forgotten. If she was not born to be a good woman, why not try and smooth the fact over a little, was her cynical fancy. Why not give the three good spinsters at Pen'yllan the benefit of her new experience? It would be so little trouble to gladden their

hearts. So, with an impatient pity for herself and them, she took upon herself the task of writing to them oftener, and at greater length; and frequently. Before her letters were completed, she found herself touched somewhat, and even prompted to be a trifle more affectionate than had been her wont. A poor little effort to have made, but the dear, simple souls at Pen'yllan greeted the change with tenderest joy, and Aunt Millicent, and Aunt Clarissa, and Aunt Hetty, each shed tears of ecstasy in secret—in secret, because, to have shed them openly, would have been to admit to one another that they had each felt their dear Lisbeth's former letters to be cold, or at least not absolutely all that could be desired.

"So like dear, dear Philip's own child," said Miss Clarissa, who was generally the family voice. "You know how often I have remarked, sister Henrietta, that our dear Lisbeth was like brother Philip in every respect, even though at times she is, perhaps, a little more—a little more reserved, as it were. Her nature, I am sure, is most affectionate."

That fortunate and much-caressed young man, Mr. Hector Anstruthers, not only met Miss Crespigny frequently, but heard much of her. Imperfect as she may appear to us, who

sit in judgment upon her, the name of her admirers was Legion. Her intimacy with the Esmonds led her into very gay and distinguished society, far more illustrious society than Mrs. Despard's patronage had been able to afford her. And having this, her little peculiarities did the rest. Her immense, dusky eyes; her small, pale, piquant face; her self-possession; her wit, and her numerous capabilities, attracted people wondrously. Even battered old beaux, who had outlived two or three generations of beauties, and who were fastidious accordingly, found an indescribable charm in this caustic, clever young person who was really not a beauty at all, if measured according to the usual standard. She was too small, too pale, too odd; but then where could one find such great, changeable, dark eyes, such artistic taste, such masses of fine hair, such a voice?

"And, apart from that," it was said of her, "there is something else. Hear her talk, by Jove! See how she can manage a man, when she chooses to take the trouble; see how little she cares for the fine speeches that would influence other women. See her dance, hear her sing, and you will begin to understand her. A fellow can never tire of her, for she is every-

thing she has the whim to be, and she is everything equally well."

"So she is, Heaven knows," Hector Anstruthers muttered, bitterly, looking across the room at her, as she stood talking to Colonel Esmond. Old Denbigh's laudatory speech fell upon his ears with a significance of its own. She could be anything she chose so long as her whim lasted; and there was the end of it. It all meant nothing. She was as false when she played her pretty part for the benefit of the Esmonds, young and old, as when she encouraged these dandies, and ensnared them. With Georgie she took up the *rôle* of *ingénue*, that was all. She was bad through and through. He felt all this sincerely, this night, when he heard the men praising her, and he was savage accordingly.

CHAPTER VIII.

I WILL TELL YOU THE TRUTH FOR ONCE.

BUT how was it, the very next night, when he dropped in to see Mrs. Despard, and surprised the syren, reading a letter of Miss Clarissa's, and reading it in the strangest of moods, reading it with a pale face, and heavy, wet lashes.

She did not pretend to hide the traces of her mental disturbance. She did not condescend to take the trouble. She evidently resented his appearance as untimely, but she greeted him with indifferent composure.

"Mrs. Despard will come down, as soon as she hears that you are here," she said, and then proceeded to fold the letter, and replace it in its envelope; and thus he saw that it bore the Pen'yllan post-mark.

What did such a whim as this mean? he asked himself, impatiently, taking in at a glance the new expression in her face, and the heaviness of her gloomy eyes. This was not one of her tricks. There was no one here to see her, and even if there had been, what end could she

serve by crying over a letter from Pen'yllan? What, on earth, had she been crying for? He had never seen her shed a tear before in his life. He had often thought that such a thing was impossible, she was so hard. Could it be that she was not really so hard, after all, and that those three innocent old women could reach her heart? But the next minute he laughed at the absurdity of the idea, and Lisbeth, chancing to raise her eyes, and coolly fixing them on his face at that moment, saw his smile.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

A demon took possession of him at once. What if he should tell her, and see how she would answer? They knew each other. Why should they keep up this pretense of being nothing but ordinary acquaintances, with no unpleasant little drama behind?

"I was thinking what an amusing blunder I had been on the verge of making," he said.

She did not answer, but still kept her eyes fixed upon him.

"I was trying to account for your sadness, on the same grounds that I would account for sadness in another woman. I was almost inclined to believe that something, in your letter, had touched your heart, as it might have

touched Georgie Esmond's. But I checked myself in time."

"You checked yourself in time," she said, slowly. "That was a good thing."

There was a brief silence, during which he felt that, as usual, he had gained nothing by his sarcasm; and then suddenly she held out her mite of a hand, with Miss Clarissa's letter in it, rather taking him aback.

"Would you like to read it?" she said. "Suppose you do. Aunt Clarissa is an old friend of yours. She speaks of you as affectionately as ever."

He could not comprehend the look she wore when she said this. It was a queer, calculating look, and had a meaning of its own; but it was a riddle he could not read.

"Take it," she said, seeing that he hesitated. "I mean what I say. I want you to read it all. It may do you good."

So, feeling uncomfortable enough, he took it. And before he had read two pages, it had affected him just as Lisbeth had intended that it should. The worst of us must be touched by pure, unselfish goodness. Miss Clarissa's simple, affectionate outpourings to her dear Lisbeth were somewhat pathetic in their way. She was so grateful for the tenderness of their

dear girl's last letter, so sweet-tempered were her ready excuses for its rather late arrival, her kind old heart was plainly so wholly dedicated to the perfections of the dear girl in question, that by the time Anstruthers had reached the conclusion of the epistle he found himself indescribably softened in mind, though he really could not have told why. He did not think that he had softened toward Lisbeth herself, but it was true, nevertheless, that he had softened toward her, in a secretly puzzled way.

Lisbeth had risen from her seat, and was standing before him, when he handed back the letter, and she met his eyes just as she had done before.

"They are very fond of me, you see," she said. "They even believe that I have a real affection for them. They think I am capable of it, just as Georgie Esmond does. Poor Georgie! Poor Aunt Clarissa! Poor Aunt Millicent! Poor everybody, indeed!" And she suddenly ended, and turned away from him, toward the fire.

But in a minute more she spoke again.

"I wonder if I am capable of it," she said. "I wonder if I am."

He could only see her side face, but something in her tone roused him to a vehement reply.

"God knows," he said, "I do not. I do not understand you, and never shall."

She turned to him abruptly then, and let him see her whole face, pale, with a strange, excited pallor, her eyes wide, and sparkling, and wet.

"That is true," she said. "You do not understand. I do not understand myself, but—Well, I have told you lies enough before, when it has suited me. Now, I will tell you the truth, for once. Your blunder was not such a blunder, after all. My heart has been touched, just as a better woman's might have been—almost as Georgie's might have been. And this letter touched it—this effusion of poor Aunt Clarissa's; and that was why I was crying when you came into the room—why I am crying now." And having made this unlooked-for confession, she walked out of the room, just as Mrs. Despard came in.

On his next visit to his friends, the Esmonds, Mr. Anstruthers found the pretty head of the lovely Miss Georgie full of a new project. Had he not heard the news? She was going to Pen'yllan with Lisbeth, and they were to stay with the Misses Tregarthyn. Miss Clarissa had written the kindest letter, the dearest, most affectionate letter, as affectionate as

if she had known her all her life. Wasn't it delightful?

"So much nicer, you know, than going to some stupid, fashionable place," said Miss, Georgie, with bright eyes, and the brightest of fresh roses on her cheeks. "Not that I am so ungrateful as to abuse poor old Brighton, and the rest; but this will be something new."

"And new things are always better than old ones," suggested Anstruthers.

"Some new things always are," answered Georgie, with spirit. "New virtues, for instance, are better than old follies. New resolutions to be charitable, instead of old tendencies to be harsh. New——"

"I give it up!" interposed Hector. "And I will agree with you. I always agree with you, Georgie," in a softer tone.

The poor, pretty face bloomed into blush-rose color, and the sweet eyes met his with innocent trouble.

"Not always," said Georgie. "You don't agree with me when I tell you that you are not as good as you ought to be—as you might be, if you would try."

"Am I such a bad fellow, then?" drawing nearer to her. "Ah, Georgie! etc., etc.——" until, in fact, he wandered off in spite of himself,

into that most dangerous ground, of which I have already spoken.

Actually, within the last few days, the idea had occurred to him, that, perhaps—possibly, just possibly—he would not be going so far wrong, if he let himself drift into a gentle passion for Georgie. Perhaps, after all, he could give her a better love than he had ever given to Lisbeth Crespigny. It would be a quieter love. Was not a man's second love always quieter than the first, and at the same time was it not always more endurable and deep? But perhaps he could make it a love worthy of her. Mind you, he was not shallow or coarse enough to think that anything would do; any mock sentiment, any semblance of affection. It was only that he longed to anchor himself somehow, and admired and trusted this warm-souled young creature so earnestly, that he instinctively turned toward her. She was far too good for him, he told himself, and it was only her goodness that could help her to overlook his many faults; but perhaps she would overlook them; and perhaps, in time, out of the ashes of that wretched passion of his youth, might arise a phœnix, fair enough to be worthy of her womanhood.

So he was something more tender, and so his

new tenderness showed itself in his handsome face, and in a certain regret that he was to lose what Pen'yllan and the Misses Tregarthyn were to gain.

"Will you let me come to see you?" he asked, at last. "Will you——"

But there he stopped, remembering Lisbeth. How would she like such a plan?

"Why should you not?" said Georgie, with a pleased blush. "I have heard you say that the Misses Tregarthyn have asked you again and again. And they seem so fond of you; and I am sure mamma and papa would be quite glad if you would run down and look at us, and then run back and tell them all the news. And as to Lisbeth, Lisbeth never objects to anything. I think she likes you well enough when you are good. Come, by all means." And she seemed to regard his proposition as so natural and pleasant, that he had no alternative but to profess to regard it as such himself; and so it was agreed upon, that, in course of time, he should follow them to Pen'yllan.

CHAPTER IX.

WE MUST ALWAYS BE TRUE.

INDEED, he drifted so far this evening, that there is no knowing how sad a story this of mine might have been, if the fates had not been kinder to pretty Georgie Esmond than they are to the generality of people. Surely it must have been because she deserved something better than the fortune of a disappointed woman, that chance interposed in her behalf before she went to sleep that night.

She had enjoyed herself very much during Hector's visit. She had sung her sweetest songs, and had been in the brightest of good spirits. Inded, she had been very happy, and perhaps had felt her innocent, warm heart stirred a little, once or twice, by the young man's tender speeches, though she was very far from being in the frame of mind to analyze the reasons for her gentle pleasure.

When her visitor had taken his departure, she came to the colonel's arm-chair, and possibly feeling somewhat conscience-stricken, because she had left "papa" to his own resources

for so long a time, she applied herself to the task of petting him in her most seductive manner.

"You are very quiet, papa," she said, settling herself upon a footstool, at his side. "I hope you are not going to have the gout again, darling. Mamma, what shall we do with him, if he insists on having the gout, when I am going to Pen'yllan? I shall have to stay at home, and so will Lisbeth. He cannot possibly dispense with us, when he has the gout."

"But I am not going to have the gout," protested the colonel, stoutly. "I am quite well, my dear; but the fact is—the fact is, I was thinking of a discovery I made this evening—a discovery about Anstruthers."

"Hector?" exclaimed Georgie, half-unconsciously, and then turned her bright eyes upon the shining fender.

"Yes," proceeded Colonel Esmond. "Hector himself. I believe I have found out what has changed him so—so deucedly, not to put too fine a point upon it—during the last four or five years. You remember what a frank, warm-hearted lad he was, at three-and-twenty, Jennie?" to Mrs. Esmond.

"Papa," interposed Georgie, "do you really think he has changed for the worse? In his heart, I mean."

"He has not changed for the better," answered the colonel. "But his heart is all right, my dear."

"I am sure," said Georgie, a little piteously. "I am sure he is good at heart."

"Of course he is," said the colonel. "But he has altered very much, in many respects. And Jennie, my dear, I have discovered that the trouble was the one you hinted at, in the beginning. There was a woman in the case. A woman who treated him shamefully."

"She must have been very heartless," said Georgie. "Poor Hector!"

The colonel warmed up.

"She was shamefully heartless, she was disgracefully, unnaturally heartless! Such cold-blooded, selfish cruelty would have been unnatural in a mature woman, and she was nothing more than a school-girl, a mere child. I congratulate myself that I did not learn her name. The man who told me the story had not heard it. If I knew it, and should ever chance to meet her, by George!" with virtuous indignation, "I don't see how a man of honor could remain in the same room with such a woman."

And then he poured out what he had heard of the story, and an unpleasant enough sound it had, when related with all the additional

coloring confidential report had given it. It was bad enough to begin with, but it was worse for having passed through the hands of the men who had gathered it together, by scraps, and odds, and ends, and joined it as they thought best.

"And the worst of it is," ended Colonel Esmond, "that he has not lived it down, as he fancies he has done. At least there are those who think so. It is said the girl is here in town now, and though they are not friends, Anstruthers cannot keep away from her altogether, and is always most savage and reckless when he has seen her."

"Poor fellow!" said Georgie, in a low, quiet voice. "Poor Hector!"

But she did not look up at any one, as she spoke. Indeed she had not looked up, even once, during the time in which this unpleasant story had been told.

Having heard it, she confronted it very sensibly. When, indeed, was she not sweet and sensible? While she listened, a hundred past incidents rushed back upon her. She remembered things she had heard Hector say, and things she had seen him do; she remembered certain restless moods of his, certain desperate whims and fancies, and she began to compre-

hend what their meaning was. Her vague fancies of his unhappiness found a firm foundation. He was wretched, and broken in faith, because this cruel girl had robbed him of his honest belief in love, and truth, and goodness. Ah, poor Hector! She did not say very much while the colonel and Mrs. Esmond discussed the matter, but she was thinking very deeply, and when she bade them good night, and went up to her room, there was a sad sort of thoughtfulness in her face.

She did not begin to undress at once, but sat down by her toilet table, and rested her fresh cheek on her hand.

"I wonder who it was?" she said, softly. "Who could it be? Whom did he know when he was three-and-twenty?"

Surely some fate guided her eyes, just at that moment, guided them to the small, half-opened note, lying at her elbow; a note so opened that the signature alone presented itself to her glance. "Your affectionate Lisbeth."

She gave a little start, and then flushed up with a queer agitation.

"Lisbeth!" she said, "Lisbeth!" And then, with quite a self-reproach in her tone, "Oh, no! Not Lisbeth. How could I say it? Not Lisbeth!" She put out her hand and

took up the note, protestingly. "I could not bear to think it," she said. "It might be any one else, but not Lisbeth." And yet the next minute a new thought forced itself upon her, a memory of some words of Lisbeth's own.

"We were nothing but a couple of children when we met at Pen'yllan," that young lady had said, a few days before, a trifle cavalierly. "He was only three-and-twenty, and as for me, what was I but a child, a school-girl, not much more than sixteen."

"But," protested Georgie, her eyes shining piteously, and the moisture forcing itself into them, "but it might not have been she; and if it was Lisbeth he loved, the story may have been exaggerated. Such stories always are; and if any part of it is true, she was so young, and did not know what she was doing. It was not half so wrong in Lisbeth as it would have been in me, who have had mamma all my life to teach me the difference between right and wrong. She had nobody but the Misses Tregarthyn; and people who are good are not always wise."

She was not very wise herself, poor, loving, little soul! At least she was not worldly wise. She could not bear the thought of connecting that cruel story with her most precious Lis-

beth, in whom she had never yet found a fault. And if it must be connected with her, what excuses might there not be! Oh, she was so sure that it was an exaggerated story, and that, if the truth were known, Lisbeth's fault had only risen out of Lisbeth's youth and innocence. She was so disturbed abour her friend, that it was quite a long time before she remembered that she had a quiet little pain of her own to contend with, only the ghost of a pain as yet, but a ghost which, but for this timely check, might have been very much harder to deal with than it was.

"I think," she said, at last, blushing a little at the sound of her own words, "I think that, perhaps, I was beginning to care for Hector more than for any one else; and I am glad that papa told me this, before—before it was too late. I think I should have been more sorry, after a little time, than I am now; and I ought to be thankful. If I did not mean to be sensible, instead of sentimental, perhaps I should try to believe that what is said is not true, and that he has really lived his trouble down; but I would rather be sensible, and believe that he only means to think of me as his friend, as he has done all his life. I must think that," she thought, eagerly. "I must remember it al-

ways, when he is with me. It would be best. And if it is Lisbeth he has loved, and he loves her yet, I—I must try to help them to forgive each other." And here she bent her face, and as she touched the note lightly with her lips, a bright drop, like a jewel, fell upon the paper. "We must always be true to each other," she whispered, tremulously. "This would be a sad world if people were not true to each other, and ready to make little sacrifices for the sake of those they love."

And thus it was that the innocent white rose of love, just turning to the sun, folded its fresh petals, and became a bud again. It was better as it was, much better that it should be a bud for a longer time, than that it should bloom too early, and lose its too lavish beauty before the perfect summer came.

CHAPTER X.

PEN'YLLAN.

EMULATING the example of the Misses Tregarthyn, Pen'yllan had put on its best dress to grace the occasion of the arrival of the visitors. As they drove from the little railway station, Lisbeth was of the opinion that she had never seen the sea so blue, and cool, and sparkling, the sands so silver white, or the village so picturesque. The truth was, the sight of it quite subdued her, and invested her with one of her softest and most charitable moods.

"I did not know it was so pretty," she said. "I believe we shall enjoy ourselves, Georgie."

Georgie was enraptured. Everything pleased her. The sea, the beach, the sky, the quaint, white cottages, the bare-legged children, the old Welsh women in their steeple hats and woollen petticoats. The up-hill streets of the village were delighful; the little bandbox of a railway station was incomparable. She had been rather pale and tired during the journey, but as soon as she set her feet upon the platform at Pen'yllan, her pallor and fatigue disappeared. The

fresh breeze from the sea tinged her cheeks, and made her eyes sparkle, and she was in the best of good spirits.

"I never saw such a dear little place in my life," she said, delightedly. "Enjoy ourselves, Lisbeth? Why, as you know, I feel just as I used to when we were all children, and went to the sea-side with mamma and the nurses, and dug caves in the sand with wooden spades, and built forts, and looked for shells. I am going to make friends with those little urchins on the beach to-morrow, and ask them to play with me."

Behold the Tregarthyn household, arrayed in all its modest splendor, when the carriage drove up to the garden gate. Behold the neatest of young handmaidens, brisk and blue-eyed, and the smallest of pages standing ready to assist with the boxes, and admire the young ladies with an exceeding admiration. Behold, also, the three Misses Tregarthyn, in the trimmest of "company" dresses, and in such a state of affectionate tremor and excitement, that they kissed their dear Lisbeth on the tip of the nose by one consent, instead of bestowing their delighted caresses upon her lips.

"So very happy to see you, my love," said Miss Clarissa, squeezing Georgie's hand, as she

led the way into the parlor. "Our dear Lisbeth's friend, I hope you are not tired, and that you left your mamma and papa quite well. Our dear Lisbeth is so tenderly attached to your mamma and papa, that if such a thing were possible, we should be quite jealous."

"They are quite as much attached to her, I can assure you," answered Georgie, in her pretty, earnest way. "Indeed, we all are, Miss Clarissa. Everybody is fond of Lisbeth." And thereby rendered her position as a favorite secure at once.

Indeed, she found her way to the heart of the spinster household in an incredibly short space of time. Miss Millicent, and Miss Hetty, and Miss Clarissa were charmed with her. Her pretty face and figure, her girlish gayety, her readiness to admire and enjoy everything, were attractions enough to enchant any spinster trio, even if she had not possessed that still greater charm of being Lisbeth's dearest friend.

The two girls shared Lisbeth's old room together; a cool nest of a place, with white draperies, and quaint ornaments, and all the child Lisbeth's treasures, of land and sea, still kept in their original places.

"It looks exactly as it did when I went away with Mrs. Despard," said Lisbeth, glancing

round, with a sigh, which meant she scarce knew what. "I gathered that sea-weed when I was fourteen, and I was always engaged in difficulties with the cooks, because I would bring in more shells than I wanted, and leave piles of them in the kitchen. Aunt Clarissa sent one woman away because we had a row, and she said I was 'a imperent young minx, allus litterin' the place with my rubbidge.' How the dear old souls did spoil me. If I had brought a whale into the drawing-room, they would have regretted, but never resented it. I had my own way often enough when I ought to have had my ears boxed."

"You must have been very happy in their loving you so," said Georgie, who had drawn a low wicker chair to the open window, and was enjoying the moonlight and the sea.

"You would have been," returned Lisbeth, drawing up chair number two. "And you would have behaved yourself better than I did. I was an ill-conditioned young person, even in those days."

They were both silent for a while after this. There was a lovely view from the window, and all was so still that neither cared to stir for a few moments. Then the thoughtfulness on Georgie's face attracted Lisbeth's attention.

"I should like to know," she said, "what you are thinking about?"

The girl drew a positively ecstatic little sigh.

"I was thinking how sweet and quiet everything looked," she said, innocently; "and how much happier I am."

"Happier?" exclaimed Lisbeth. "When were you unhappy, Georgie?"

The surprise in her tone brought Georgie to a recognition of what her words had unconsciously implied. She found herself blushing, and wondering at her own simplicity. She had not meant to say so much. She could not comprehend why she should have said anything of that kind at all.

"It is strange enough to hear that you can be made happier than you always seem to be," said Lisbeth. "You speak as if—" And then, her quick eye taking in the girl's trepidation, she stopped short. "You never had a trouble, Georgie?" she added, in a voice very few of her friends would have known; it was so soft.

"No," said Georgie. "Oh, no, Lisbeth! Not a trouble, exactly; not a trouble at all, indeed; only—" And suddenly she turned her bright, appealing eyes to Lisbeth's face. "I don't know why I said it," she said. "It was nothing real, Lisbeth, or else I am sure

you would have known. But it— Well, I might have had a trouble, and I was saved from it, and I am glad, and—thankful." And, to Miss Crespigny's surprise, she bent forward, and kissed her softly on the cheek.

Lisbeth asked her no questions. She was not fond of asking questions, and she was a young person of delicacy and tact, when she was in an affectionate mood. She was too partial to Georgie to wish to force her into telling her little secrets. But a certain thought flashed through her mind, as she sat with her eyes resting on the sea.

"She is the sort of girl," she said, sharply, to herself, "who would be likely to have no trouble but a love trouble. Who has been making love to her, or rather, who, among all her admirers, would be likely to touch her heart?"

But this mental problem was by no means easy to solve. There were so many men who admired Georgie Esmond, and such a large proportion of them were men whom any girl might have loved.

It was one of Lisbeth's chief wonders, that Georgie, who was so soft of heart, and ready with affection, should have held her own so long against so agreeable a multitude of adorers.

Certainly, if she had lived through any little romance, she had kept her secret well. She did not look like a love-lorn young lady when she came down, the next morning, fresh and rosy, and prepared to explore Pen'yllan in all its fastnesses. It was exhilarating to see her; and the Misses Tregarthyn were delighted beyond bounds. She made a pilgrimage through half the up-and-down-hill little streets in the village, and, before dinner, had managed to drag Lisbeth a mile along the shore, against a stiff breeze, which blew their long, loose hair about, and tinted their cheeks brilliantly. Lisbeth followed her with an amused wonder at her enthusiasm, mingled with discontent at her own indifference. It was she who ought to have been in raptures, and she was not in raptures at all. Had she no natural feeling whatever? Any other woman would have felt a sentimental tenderness for the place which had been her earliest home.

They had found a comfortable nook behind a cluster of sheltering rocks, and were sitting on the sand, when Lisbeth arrived at this stage of thought. The place was an old haunt of hers, and Hector Anstruthers had often followed her there in their boy and girl days; and the sight of the familiar stretch of sea and

sand irritated her somehow. She picked up a shell, and sent it skimming away toward the water, with an impatient gesture.

"Georgie," she said, "I should like to know what you see in Pen'yllan to please you so."

"Everything," said Georgie. "And then, somehow, I seem to know it. I think its chief attraction is, that you lived here so long."

Lisbeth picked up another shell, and sent it skimming after the other.

"What a girl you are!" she said. "It is always your love and your heart that are touched. You are all heart. You love people, and you love everything that belongs to them; their homes, their belongings, their relations. It is not so with me; it never was. You are like what Hector Anstruthers was, when I first knew him. Bah!" with a shrug of his shoulders. "How fond the foolish fellow was of Aunt Hetty, and Aunt Millicent, and Aunt Clarissa."

Her tongue had slipped, just as Georgie's had done the night before. For the moment she forgot herself entirely, and only remembered that old sentimental affection of her boyish lover; that affection for her spinster relatives, which, in the past, had impressed her as being half troublesome and half absurd.

CHAPTER XI.

A CONFESSION.

GEORGIE turned to her, taking sudden courage.

"Lisbeth," she said, "you never told me much about your acquaintance with Hector Anstruthers. I wonder how it was. You knew him very well, it seems."

"I wish," broke out Lisbeth, almost angrily, "that I had never known him at all."

The faithful heart, beating in the breast of the girl at her side, leaped nervously.

"It was Lisbeth," said she to herself. "It was Lisbeth."

"I wish," repeated Lisbeth, frowning at the sea, "that I had never seen him."

"Why?" was Georgie's quiet question.

"Because—because it was a bad thing for us both," in greater impatience than ever.

Georgie looked up at her sadly.

"Why, again?" she ventured, in her soft voice. She could not help it.

But for a moment Lisbeth did not answer.

She had risen, and stood leaning against the rock, a queer look on her face, a queer darkening in her eyes. At length she broke into a little, hard laugh, as if she meant to defy herself to be emotional.

"How horror-stricken you would be, if I were to tell you why," she said.

"Does that mean," Georgie put it to her "that you were unkind to him?"

"It means," was her strange reply—"it means that it was I who ruined his life forever."

She made the confession fairly, in spite of herself. And she was emotional—vehement. She could not stand this innocent Georgie, and her beliefs any longer. She had been slowly approaching this mood for months, and now every inner and outer influence seemed to combine against her natural stubborn secretiveness. Perhaps Pen'yllan, the sea, the shore, the sky, helped her on to the end. At any rate, she must tell the truth this once, and hear what this innocent Georgie would say to it.

"I ruined his life for him," she repeated. "I broke his faith. I believe I am to blame for every evil change the last few years have wrought in him. I, myself—Lisbeth. Do you hear, Georgie?"

The face under Georgie's straw hat was rather pale, but it was not horror-stricken.

"You were too young," she faltered, "to understand."

"Too young?" echoed Lisbeth. "I never was young in my life. I was born old. I was born a woman, and I was born cold and hard. That was it. If I had been like other girls, he would have touched my heart, after he had touched my vanity, or he might even have touched my heart first. You would have loved him with all your soul. Are you willing to hear the whole history, Georgie?"

"Quite willing. Only," and she raised her face with a bright, resolute, affectionate look, "you cannot make me think harshly of you. So, don't try, Lisbeth."

Lisbeth regarded her with an entirely new expression, which had, nevertheless, a shade of her old wonder in it.

"I really do not believe I could," she said. "You are very hard to deal with; at least I find it hard to deal with you. You are a new experience. If there was just a little flavor of insincerity or uncharitableness in you, if you would be false to your beliefs now and then, I should know what to do; but, as it is, you

are perplexing. Notwithstanding, here comes the story."

She put her hands behind her, and bracing herself against the rock, told it from beginning to end, in her coolest, most daring way, even with a half-defiant air. If she had been telling some one else's story, she could not have been more caustic and unsparing, more determined to soften no harsh outline, or smooth over anything. She set the girl Lisbeth before her listener, just as Lisbeth Crespigny at seventeen had been. Selfish, callous, shallow, and deep, at once: restless, ungrateful, a half-ripe coquette, who, notwithstanding her crudeness, was yet far too ripe for her age. She pictured the honest, boyish young fellow, who had fallen victim to her immature fascinations, simply because he was too guileless and romantic to see in any woman anything but a goddess. She described his sincerity, his unselfish willingness to bear her caprices, and see no wrong in them; his lavish affection for every thing and every one who shared his love for her; his readiness to believe, his tardiness to doubt and see her as she really was; the open-hearted faith which had made the awakening so much harder to bear, when it forced itself upon him at last. She left out the recital of no petty wrong she

had done him, and no small tyranny or indignity she had made him feel. She told the whole story, in fact, as she saw it now; not as she had seen it in that shallow, self-ruled girlhood; and when she had touched upon everything, and ended with that last scene in the garden, among Aunt Clarissa's roses, she stopped.

And there was a silence.

Georgie's eyelashes were wet, and so were her cheeks. A tear or so stained her pink cravat. It was so sorrowful. Poor Hector again! And then, of course, poor Lisbeth! By her own showing, Lisbeth deserved no pity; but the warm young heart gave her pity enough, and to spare. Something had been wrong somewhere. Indeed, it seemed as if everything had been wrong, but—Poor Lisbeth! She was so fond of Lisbeth herself, and mamma was so fond of her, and the Misses Tregarthyn. So many people were fond of Lisbeth.

And then Lisbeth's voice startled her. A new voice, tremulous and as if her mood was a sore and restive one.

"You are crying, of course, Georgie? I knew you would."

"I have been crying."

Pause enough to allow of a struggle, and then—

"Well, since you are crying, I suppose I may cry, too. It is queer enough that I should cry, but—" And to Georgie's amazement and trouble, Lisbeth put her hand up on the rough rock, and laid her face against it.

"Lisbeth!" cried the girl.

"Wait a moment," said Lisbeth. "I don't know what has come over me. It is a new thing for me. I—I——"

It was a new thing, indeed, and it did not last very long. When she raised her head, and turned again, her eyelashes were wet, too, and she was even pale.

"Ah, Lisbeth!" said Georgie, pitying her, "you are sorry."

Lisbeth smiled, faintly.

"I never was sorry before for anything I had done; never, in my life," she answered. "I have had a theory that people should take care of themselves, as I did. But now—Well, I suppose I am sorry—for Hector Anstruthers; and perhaps a little for myself. No one will offer me such an unreasoning love again. Very few women are offered such a love once; but I always got more than my share of everything. It is my way. I suppose

I was born under a lucky star. Georgie, what do you think of me now?"

Georgie got up, and kissed her, in a most earnest fashion.

"What?" cried Lisbeth, with a dubious smile. "You can't be moral, and improving, and sanctimonious, even now. Think what an eloquent lecture you might read me! I have sometimes thought I was merely created to point a moral, or adorn a tale! See how reckless I am, after all. You ought to be down on me, Georgie. It is your duty, as a well-trained young woman of the period."

"Then," said Georgie, "I can't do my duty. You are so different from other people. How can I pretend to understand what has made you do things that other people are not tempted to do? And then you know how fond I am of you, Lisbeth."

"You are a good, pure little soul!" cried Lisbeth, her pale face flushing excitedly. "And the world is a thousand times better for your being in it. I am better myself, and Heaven knows I need something to make me better. Here, let me take hold of your hand, and let us go home."

And as they turned homeward, on the beach, hand-in-hand, like a couple of children, Georgie

saw that there were tears in the inconsistent creature's eyes again.

They did not say much upon the subject after this. That wise young woman, Miss Esmond, felt that it was a subject of far too delicate a nature to be lightly touched upon. It had been Lisbeth's secret so long, that, even after this confidence, she could not help regarding it as Lisbeth's secret still. Perhaps she felt in private that there were certain little confidences of her own, which she would scarcely be willing even for Lisbeth to refer to, as if they were her own property. For instance, that accidental confession, made in the bedroom, on the first night they had spent in it together. How glad she had been that Lisbeth had let it pass, as if she had not noticed it very particularly. But though the subject was not discussed, is it to be supposed that it was not brought to mind at all, but was buried in oblivion? Certainly not. While that terse young woman, Miss Esmond, said little, she thought much, and deeply. She had constantly before her a problem, which she was very anxious to work out. Was it not possible that these two interesting beings might be brought to—might be induced to—well, not to put too fine a point upon it—to think better of each

other, and the unfortunate past, and the world generally? Would it not be dreadful to think that so much poetic material had been lost? That these two who might have been so happy, should drift entirely apart, and leave their romance incomplete, as the most unsatisfactory of novels? Probably, having sensibly, even if with a little pang, given up that bud of a romance of her own, the girl felt the need of some loving plot to occupy her mind; and if so, it was quite natural and very charming, that she should turn to her friend. Hector would make his appearance one of these fine days, and then, perhaps, Pen'yllan, and its old familiar scenes, would soften his heart, as she had an idea they had softened Lisbeth's. Surely, old memories would touch him tenderly, and make him more ready to forgive his injuries. In fact, Miss Georgie painted for herself some very pretty mental pictures, in which the figures of Lisbeth and her ex-lover were always the prominent features. Lisbeth in the trysting-place, the sea-breeze blowing her beautiful hair about, and coloring her pale face; that queer mist of tears in her mysterious eyes. Lisbeth, in one of her soft moods, making those strange, restive, unexpected speeches, which were so fascinating, because so unlooked-

for, and Hector Anstruthers standing by, and listening. Such interesting little scenes as these she imagined, and, having imagined them, positively drew some consolation from their phantom existence.

CHAPTER XII.

A VISITOR.

IN the meantime, however, she made herself very agreeable and attractive to her hostesses, and enjoyed Pen'yllan very much, in a girlish way. She explored the tiny village, and the rude shore. She made friends with fishermen, and their wives, and sturdy children. She won admiration on every side by her pretty interest in everything appertaining to the Pen'yllanites. She took long walks on the sands, and brought home shells, and sea-weed, and pebbles, with such honest delight in any trifling rarity, as made Lisbeth look on and feel restless, and the Misses Tregarthyn grow young again, unitedly.

"I wish, my dear," said Miss Clarissa to Lisbeth, "that you enjoyed yourself as much; but—but I am afraid you do not. I am afraid you find Pen'yllan rather dull."

"I never found Pen'yllan so pleasant in my life before, but you know I am not like Georgie," said Lisbeth. "Pen'yllan is all right, Aunt Clarissa, and I enjoy myself here more than I should anywhere else."

"I am glad to hear you say that, my love," Miss Clarissa faltered. "Sometimes, do you know, I have really fancied that you were not quite—quite happy?"

Lisbeth got up from her chair, and came to the window, her incomprehensible eyes reaching far out to sea.

"Happy!" she echoed, absently. "Is anybody happy? What a conundrum to answer? As for me, I give it up."

She gave up a good many things during these weeks at Pen'yllan. She was wont to be fond of a certain cool class of metaphysics, but somehow things of that order seemed to slip from her grasp. She was not so sure of her self as she had been—not so obstinately complacent. Indeed, she had never been so ill-satisfied and out of patience with Lisbeth Crespigny in her life.

In the course of a week or so, Hector Anstruthers came, as he had promised. One quiet afternoon, Miss Millicent, who was sitting at the window, looked out into the garden, with a sudden expression of surprise.

"Sister Clarissa!" she exclaimed, "Miss Esmond, there is a gentleman coming up the walk; a young gentleman, and really a very handsome one. Do either of you know him?

Dear me, his face seems very familiar. It can't be——"

Georgie ran to the window, and the next minute was waving her kind little hand to the individual in question, and smiling, and nodding her head.

"You ought to know him, Miss Tregarthyn," she said. "It is Mr. Hector Anstruthers."

"Oh!" broke forth Miss Clarissa, in some distress.

"And Lisbeth is here! I do hope, sister Millicent——"

"He saw Lisbeth very often when she was at home," explained Georgie, feeling very guilty, and extremely fearful of committing herself. "I know Lisbeth did not like him very well at first, but he was one of Mrs. Despard's favorites, and—he is a sort of cousin of mine."

It was a great relief to the Misses Tregarthyn, this piece of news. They remembered various unpleasant little episodes of the past too well, to have confronted serenely the re-responsibility of bringing their dear Lisbeth face to face with this young man again. Indeed, Miss Millicent had turned pale, and Miss Clarissa had lost her breath at the mere thought of it. They had hardly recovered themselves, when the visitor was handed into the room.

But, of course, what Miss Esmond said must be correct, and, under such circumstances, how delightful it would be to welcome this genius and hero to Pen'yllan once more.

They had heard wondrous reports of his career from chance visitors, even though the beloved Lisbeth had been so reticent. They had heard of his good fortune, his good looks, his talent, his popularity, and, remembering the fair-haired, blue-eyed young fellow, whom Lisbeth had snubbed so persistently, they had wondered among themselves if all they heard could possibly be true. But here was the admirable Crichton to speak for himself, and so changed was his appearance, so imposing his air, so amiable his condescension, that each gentle spinster owned in secret that really, after all, it seemed probable that rumor, for once, had not exaggerated. And it is not to be denied that Mr. Hector Anstruthers was shown to an advantage upon this occasion. On his way from the small bandbox of a station, he had been reminded of many a little incident in that far-distant past, which had somehow or other warmed his heart toward these good, simple souls. They had been true and kind, at least. They had never failed him from first to last; they had pitied and tried to

comfort him when his fool's paradise had been so rudely broken into. He remembered how Miss Clarissa had stolen down into the garden, that last, bitter night, and finding him lying full length, face downward, upon the dewy grass, among the roses, had bent over him, and put her timid hand upon his shoulder, and cried silently, as she tried to find words with which she could console him, and still be loyal to her faithful affection for that wretched girl. He remembered, too, how fiercely he had answered her, like a passionate young cub as he was; telling her to leave him alone, and let him fight it out with himself and the devil, for he had had enough of women. She had not been offended, good little Miss Clarissa, though she had been dreadfully shocked and troubled. She had cried more than ever, and patted his sleeve, and begged him to think of his dear mother, and forgive—forgive; ending by sobbing into her dainty handkerchief.

So, when he entered the pretty parlor, and saw this kind friend standing near Georgie, a trifle tremulous and agitated at the sudden sight of him, everything but his memory of what a true, generous little soul she was, slipped out of his mind, and he actually blushed with pleasure.

"My dear Miss Clarissa!" he said; and, with

a sudden frank boyishness, such as Georgie had never seen him give way to before, he put one strong young arm about her, and kissed her withered cheek twice.

"My dear boy!" said Miss Clarissa. A moment before she had been on the verge of making him her best bow, and calling him "Mr. Anstruthers." "How pleasant it is to see you! How pleasant it is!"

The brightest of sweet smiles dimpled Miss Georgie's mouth. How good, and honest, and unaffected he was, after all! How kind at heart! How she wished that Lisbeth could have seen him just then! Indeed, she found it necessary to hold herself very bravely in check for a moment or so, for fear she should be tempted to give way to any weak impulse of feeling; he seemed so worthy to be admired and loved.

But Lisbeth was not in the house. No one knew where she was, exactly. Lately she had indulged in the habit of taking even longer walks than Georgie's, and often lonely ones. Sometimes, in the morning, or afternoon, they would miss her for an hour or so, and she would come back rather fagged, and well blown about, and at such times it always appeared that she had been for a walk.

"For the good of my health," she once said to Georgie. "I find it benefits me, physically and morally. Pen'yllan is a queer place, and is productive of queer effects upon people."

Among other things, Georgie discovered that she, too, sometimes talked to the children who played upon the sands, and that she had her favorites, to whom she had once or twice even condescended to tell certain tales of fairies and mermaids. When Georgie mentioned this discovery, she laughed and colored, as if half ashamed of herself, and explained the matter in her usual style.

"The fact is," she said, "I do it as a sort of penance. When I was a girl, and lived here, the children were afraid of me, and it was no wonder. I used to concoct horrible eerie tales about the devil-fish, to frighten them, and I rather enjoyed my reputation as a sort of hob-goblin creature, who had an uncanny knowledge of the terrors of the sea. Some of them used to delight me by screaming, and running away, when they caught sight of me; and now I have arrived at years of discretion, I feel as if I ought to do something to retrieve myself with this second generation. Poor little imps! Their lives are not too easy."

She was away, indulging in one of these walks, this afternoon.

"We could find her somewhere on the shore, I know," said Georgie, in answer to Miss Tregarthyn's inquiry. "She is fond of the shore, and always goes there for her strolls. If Hector is equal to a sea-breeze, and a mile or so of sand, after his journey, he might even go in search of her.

And it having been proved satisfactorily that Hector was not only equal to such exertion, but anxious to enjoy it; after an hour's chat with Miss Millicent, and Miss Clarissa, and Miss Hetty, Georgie ran up stairs for her hat, and returning to the parlor, took charge of the expedition.

It really seemed one of the peculiarities of Pen'yllan to be on its good behavior at opportune times.

"It is bluer than ever, to-day," said Georgie, nodding at her friend, the sea, as they strolled toward it. "And the crests of the little waves are whiter, and the sea-gulls are in a better temper than they usually are, and more satisfied with their lot."

She had never looked brighter or more attractive herself, and this was her companion's mental comment. The many resplendent

young swains who admired Miss Georgie Esmond, as she appeared in London ball-rooms, would surely have become more hopelessly enamored than ever, had they seen her with the Pen'yllan roses on her cheeks, and the sparkle of the sun-lit sea in her eyes.

"Where is there another creature like her?" said Hector Anstruthers to himself. "Where is there another creature as fresh, as good, as natural and unspotted?"

CHAPTER XIII.

A GHOST.

HE had thought of her very often of late, and indeed had been quite eager to make his visit to Pen'yllan, for no other reason, he told himself, than because he should see her there, and hear her sweet young voice again. And now he had come, and she had welcomed him, and they were walking over the sands, side by side. And yet—and yet— Was it possible that he felt restless and dissatisfied with his own emotions? Was it possible that the rapture he had tried to imagine, in London, was not so rapturous here, in Pen'yllan? Could it be that, after all, he was still only admiring her affectionately, in a brotherly way, as he had always done—admiring and reverencing her, gently, as the dearest, prettiest, truest girl he had ever known? Long ago, when, at the time of that old folly, he remembered a certain tremulous bliss he had experienced when he had been permitted to spend an hour with the beloved object, he remembered the absolute pangs of joy with which one glance from certain great,

cruel, dark eyes had filled him; he remembered how the sound of a girlish voice had possessed the power to set every drop of blood in his veins beating. He was as calm as ever he had been in his life, as he strolled on with Georgie Esmond; he could meet her bright eyes without even the poor mockery of a tremor. He had felt nothing but calm pleasure even when he grasped her soft hand in greeting. Would it always be thus? Was it best that it should be so? Perhaps! And yet, in the depths of his heart lay a strange yearning for just one touch of the old delirium—just one pang of the old, bitter-sweet pain.

"There!" exclaimed Georgie, ending his reverie for him. "There she is, standing on the rocks. Don't you see that dark-blue ribbon, fluttering?"

It was curious enough that his heart should give such a startled bound, when his eyes fell upon the place to which Georgie directed his attention. But, then again, perhaps, it was no wonder, considering how familiar the scene before him was. Years ago he had been wont to come to this very spot, and find a slight figure standing in that very nook of rocks; a slight girl's figure, clad in a close-fitting suit of sailor-blue, a cloud of blown-about hair falling to the

waist, and dark-blue ribbons fluttering from a rough-and-ready little sailor-hat of straw. And there was the very figure, and the very accompaniments; the dress, the abundant tossed-about hair, the fluttering ribbon, the sea, the sky, the shore. He was so silent, for a moment, that Georgie spoke to him again, after a quick glance at his changed expression.

"Don't you see that it is Lisbeth?" she said, laughing. "She is very quiet, but she is alive, nevertheless. We shall reach her in a minute. She is watching the gulls, I think. I thought we should find her here. This is our favorite resting-place."

Lisbeth was evidently either watching something, or in a very thoughtful mood. She did not move, or even appear to be conscious of any approaching presence, until Georgie called to her, "Lisbeth! Lisbeth!" and then she looked round with a start.

"What!" she said. "Is it you two? How you startled me! You came like ghosts! And Mr. Anstruthers," glancing at Hector, "looks like one. He is so pale!"

"I have seen a ghost," was his reply.

"I am glad to hear it," said Lisbeth, coolly. "Ghosts make a place interesting."

She is so like herself, so self-possessed, and

wholly Lisbeth-like, that she wakens him completely from the sort of stupor into which he had for a moment fallen. She holds out her hand for him to shake, and favors him with an unmoved, not too enthusiastic smile. She is polite and reasonably hospitable in her greeting, but she does not seem to be overwhelmed with the power of her emotions.

"Sit down," she says, "and let us rest a while. We have plenty of time to reach home before dinner; and if we hadn't, it would not matter much. My aunts are used to being kept waiting. They are too amiable to be iron-hearted about rules."

So they sit down, and then, despite the reality of her manner, Anstruthers finds himself in a dream again. As Lisbeth talks, her voice carries him back to the past. Unconsciously she has fallen into an attitude which is as familiar as all the rest, her hands folded on her knees, her face turned seaward. The scent of the sea is in the air; the sound of its murmurs in his ears. The color on the usually clear, pale cheek is the color he used to admire with such lover-like extravagance—a pure pink tint, bright and rare. She seems to have gone back to her seventeen years, and he has gone back with her.

When at last they rise to return, he is wandering in this dream still, and he is very silent as they walk home. As they enter the garden gate, they see Miss Clarissa standing at the window, watching for them, just as she had used to do, to Lisbeth's frequent irritation, in the olden days. And Lisbeth, pausing at the gate, gathered a large red rose.

"The roses are in bloom," she says, "just as they were when I went away with Mrs. Despard. I could almost persuade myself that I had never been away at all."

That velvet-leaved red rose was placed carelessly in her hair, when she came down stairs, after dressing for dinner, and its heavy fragrance floated about her. She wore one of her prettiest dresses, looked her best, and was in a good humor; and accordingly the Misses Tregarthyn were restored to perfect peace of mind, and rendered happy. It was plain, they thought, that Miss Esmond had been right, and there was no need for fear. How the spinster trio enjoyed themselves that evening, to be sure!

"You used to sing some very pretty songs for us, my love," said Miss Clarissa. "I wonder if you remember the one Hector was so fond of? Something very sweet, about drink-

ing to somebody with your eyes, and he would not ask for wine. I really forget the rest."

Lisbeth, who was turning over a pile of her old music, looked up at Anstruthers with a civil, wicked smile.

"Did I sing, 'Drink to me only'?" she said. "And was it a favorite of yours? I wonder if it is here? How nice that Aunt Clarissa should remind us of it!"

She drew out the yellow old sheet from under the rest of the music in a minute more, her smile not without a touch of venomous amusement. How she had loathed it a few years ago!

"I wonder if I could sing it," she said; and, prompted by some daring demon, she sat down at the piano, and sang it from beginning to end. But, by the time she had struck the last chord, her mood changed. She got up, with a little frown, and she did not look at Anstruthers at all.

"Bah!" she said. "What nonsense it is!" And she pushed the poor, old, faded sheet impatiently aside.

Anstruthers moved a step forward, and laid his hand upon it.

"Will you give it to me?" he asked, with a suppressed force in his manner, quite new.

"Why?" she demanded, indifferently.

"For a whim's sake," he answered. "There is no accounting for tastes. Perhaps I may fancy that I should like to learn it."

She raised her eyebrows, and gave her shoulders a puzzled little shrug.

"You are welcome to it," she commented. "It is not an article of value."

"Thanks," rather sardonically; and he folded the sheet, and slipped it into his pocket.

Their life at Pen'yllan was scarcely exciting; but notwithstanding this, they found it by no means unenjoyable, even now, when the first week or so had accustomed them to it. They took long stretches of walks; they sunned themselves on the sands; they sailed, and rowed, and read, and studied each other in secret. Georgie, who studied Lisbeth and Anstruthers by turns, found that she made more progress with the latter than the former. Lisbeth, never easy to read, was even more incomprehensible than usual. She shared all their amusements, and was prolific in plans to add to them, but her manner toward her ex-adorer was merely reasonably civil and hospitable, and certainly did not encourage comment. To her friend it was a manner simply inscrutable.

"Can she care at all?" wondered Georgie.

"She does not look as if she had ever been sorry in her life; and yet she cried that day."

With Anstruthers it was different. He could not pursue the even tenor of his way without feeling sometimes a sting. At first he controlled himself pretty well, and held his own against circumstances, even almost calmly. Then the stings came only at rare intervals, but afterward he experienced them more frequently. He was not so callous, after all, and he found it more difficult to conceal his restlessness when some old memory rushed upon him with sudden force. Such memories began to bring bitter, rebellious moods with them, and once or twice such moods revealed themselves in bitter speeches. Sometimes he was silent, and half gloomy, sometimes recklessly gay. But at all times he held to Georgie as his safeguard. Whatever his mood might be, he drew comfort from her presence. She gave him a sense of security. That kind little hand of hers held him back from many an indiscretion. Surely, the day was drawing near when he could open his heart to her, and ask her to let the kind young hand be his safeguard forever. He was sorely tempted many a day, but somehow it always ended in "Not yet! Not quite yet!" But his tender admiration

for her showed itself so undisguisedly, in every action, that the Misses Tregarthyn looked on delighted.

"I am sure that there is an understanding between them," observed Miss Millicent.

Miss Hetty shook her head in a comfortable, approving fashion.

"Ah, yes, indeed!" she said. "One can easily see that. What do you think, my dear?" This was to Lisbeth, who was sitting reading.

Lisbeth shut her book suddenly, and getting up, came to the window.

"What is it you are saying?" she demanded, in the manner of one who had just awakened from a sleep, or a drowsy reverie. "I don't think I heard you."

"We were speaking," said Miss Millicent, "of our young friends in the garden. Sister Hetty thinks, with me, that Hector is very fond of Miss Esmond."

CHAPTER XIV.

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN VERY SWEET.

LISBETH looked out into the garden, where the two stood together, Georgie blushing and smiling, as fresh and flower-like herself as any of Miss Clarissa's many blossoms, Hector talking to her eagerly, his eyes full of pleasure in her beauty and youth.

"Fond of her?" she said, abstractedly. "Who is not fond of her?"

"But," suggested Miss Hetty, "we mean fond of her in—in a different way."

She had laid her hand on Lisbeth's shoulder, and, as she spoke, she thought she felt a slight start; but the girl's voice was steady enough when she spoke the next minute.

"Oh!" she said, laughing a little, "you mean that he is in love with her. I have no doubt you are right, though—though I had scarcely thought of that. Men are always in love with somebody; and if he is in love with Georgie, it does him great credit. I did not think he had the good taste."

But the fact was, that the idea was some-

thing like a new light dawning upon her. Actually she had been so blind as not to think of this. And it had been before her eyes day after day!

"You have been an idiot," was her unceremonious mental comment upon her own stupidity. "You have thought so much of yourself, that you have seen nothing. It is Hector Anstruthers who has touched her heart. She doubted either herself, or him, when she was 'not so happy.' And this is the end of it—the end of it. Good!"

Perhaps she was relieved, and felt more comfortable, for she had never been more amusing and full of spirit than she had appeared when she joined the couple in the garden.

The twilight had been falling when she left the house; and when the soft dusk came on, they still loitered in the garden. The air was warm and balmy. Miss Clarissa's flower beds breathed forth perfume; the murmur of the waves upon the beach crept up to them; the moon rose in the sky, solemn, watchful, and silver-clear.

"Who would care to go back to earth, and parlors?" said Georgie. "This is Arcadia—silent, odorous, and sweet. Let us stay, Lisbeth."

So they sauntered here and there until they were tired, and then they found a resting-place, under a laburnum tree; and Anstruthers, flinging himself upon the grass, lay at full length, his hands clasped under his head, watching Lisbeth, in newly stirred bitterness and discontent.

Discontent? Ah! what discontent it was What bitterness! To-night it reached its climax. Was he a man, indeed, or had he gone back to boyhood, and to that old folly upon which his youth had been wrecked? Moonlight was very becoming to Lisbeth. It gave her colorless face the white of a lily leaf, and her great eyes a new depth and shadow. She looked her best, just now, as she had a habit of looking her best, at all inopportune and dangerous times.

Georgie, leaning, in a luxury of quiet dreaming, against the trunk of the laburnum, broke in upon his mental plaints, by speaking to her friend.

"Sing, Lisbeth," she said. "You look as if you were in a singing mood."

Lisbeth smiled, a faint smile not unlike moonlight. She was in a singing mood, but she was in a fantastic, half-melancholy mood, too. Perhaps this was why she chose a rather

melancholy song. She folded her hands upon her knees, in that favorite fashion of hers, the fashion Anstruthers remembered so well, and began;

"All that I had to give I gave—
Good-by!
Yet Love lies silent in the grave,
And that I lose, which most I crave,
Good-by! Good-by! Good-by!

"Nay! turn your burning eyes away!
Good-by!
It comes to this—this bitter day,
That you and I can only say,
Good-by! Good-by! Good-by!

"The rest lies buried with the past!
Good-by!
The golden days, that sped so fast,
The golden days, too bright to last;
Good-by! Good-by! Good-by!

"The fairest rose blooms but a day,
Good-by!
The fairest Spring must end with May,
And you and I can only say,
Good-by! Good-by! Good-by!"

"Ah, Lisbeth!" cried Georgie, when she stopped. "What a sad thing! I never heard you sing it before."

"No," answered Lisbeth. "I don't think

anybody ever heard me sing it before. It is an imitation of a little German song I have heard, or read, somewhere. I can't remember where, indeed. I can remember nothing but that the refrain of 'Good-by' haunted me; and the words I have just sung grew out of it."

Anstruthers said nothing. He had watched her face, as she sung, and had almost lost control over himself, as he was often on the verge of doing lately. What a consummate actress the girl was! The mournful little song had fallen from lips as sweetly and sadly as if both words and music welled from a tender, tried, soft heart. An innocent girl of sixteen might have sung just such a song, in just such a voice, if she had lost her lover. Once he had been amazed by the fancy that the large, mellow, dark eyes were full of tears.

He had been quiet enough before, but after the song was ended, he did not utter a word, but lay silent upon the grass until their return to the house.

Georgie rose first, and then Lisbeth and himself. But Georgie, going on before them, left them a moment together, and as they crossed the lawn, Lisbeth paused, and bending over a bed of lilies to gather a closed white

bud, sang, in a low tone, as if unconsciously, the last verse.

"The fairest rose blooms but a day,
Good-by!
The fairest Spring must end with May,
And you and I can only say,
Good-by! Good-by! Good-by!"

When she stood upright, she found herself confronting a face so pale and agitated, that she drew back a little.

"I wish to God," he broke out, "I wish to God that you were a better woman!"

She looked up at him for a second, with a smile, cold, and strange, and bitter.

"I wish to God I was!" she said, and, without another word, turned from him and walked away, flinging her closed lilies upon the dewy grass.

When, the next day, at noon, they strolled out upon the lawn, the lilies were lying there, their waxen petals browning and withering in the hot sun. Georgie stooped, and picked one up.

"What a pity!" she said. "They would have been so pretty to-day. I wonder who gathered them."

Lisbeth regarded the poor little brown bud with a queer smile.

"I gathered them," she said. "It does seem a pity, too—almost cruel, doesn't it? But that is always the way with people. They gather their buds first, and sympathize with them afterward." Then she held out her hand. "Give it to me," she said; and when Georgie handed the wilted thing to her, she took it, still half smiling in that queer way. "Yes," she commented. "It might have been very sweet to-day. It was useless cruelty to kill it so early. It will never be a flower now. You see, Georgie, my dear," dryly, "how I pity my bud—afterward! Draw a moral from me, and never gather your flowers too soon. They might be very sweet to-morrow."

She had not often talked in this light, satirical way of late, but Georgie observed that she began to fall into the habit again after this. She had odd moods, and was not quite so frank as her young admirer liked to see her. And something else struck Georgie as peculiar, too. She found herself left alone with Hector much oftener. In their walks, and sails, and saunterings in the garden, Lisbeth's joining them became the exception, instead of the rule, as it had been heretofore. It seemed always by chance that she failed to accompany them, but it came to the same thing in the end.

Georgie pondered over the matter in private, with much anxiety. She really began to feel as if something strange had happened. Had there been a new quarrel? Hector was more fitful and moody than ever. Sometimes he looked so miserable and pale, that she was a little frightened. When he talked, he was bitter; and when he was silent, his silence was tragical. But he was as fond of her as ever he had been. Nay, he even seemed fonder of her, and more anxious to be near her, at all times.

"I am not a very amusing companion, Georgie, my dear," he would say, "but you will bear with me, I know. You are my hope and safeguard, Georgie. If you would not bear with me, who would?"

She often wondered at his way of speaking of her, as his safeguard. Indeed, he not only called her his safeguard, but showed, by his manner, that he flew to her as a sort of refuge. Once, when they had been sitting together in silence for some time, he suddenly seized her hand, and kissed it passionately and desperately.

"Georgie," he said, "if I were to come to you some day and ask you to save me from a great danger, would you try to do as I asked you?"

She did not draw her hand away, but let it rest in his, as she answered him, with a quiet, half-sad smile:

"I would not refuse to try to help any one in the world, who was in danger—even a person I was not fond of," she said. "And you know we have been friends all our lives, Hector."

"But if I were to ask a great gift of you," he persisted, "a great gift, of which I was not worthy, but which was the only thing that could save me from ruin?"

"You must ask me first," she said, and then, though it was done very gently, she did take her hand away.

CHAPTER XV.

WE WON'T GO YET.

HAVING coolly laid her plans for leaving the two to enjoy themselves, Lisbeth retired upon her laurels, with the intention of finding amusements of her own. She had entertained herself before, easily enough, why not again? Naturally, as they had fallen in love with each other, they would not want her; even Georgie would not want her. And it was quite natural that they should have fallen in love. They were the sort of people to do it. And Georgie would make a charming wife, and, if her husband proved a tyrant, would still go down upon her knees and adore him, and thank Heaven for her prince's affection, and his perfections, to the end of her innocent days. As for herself, it was no business of hers, when she had done her duty toward her friend. The best thing she could do, would be to leave them alone, and she left them alone, and gave them every opportunity to be lover-like, if they had chosen.

But one day, Miss Clarissa, looking up from

her sewing, started, quite nervously, at the sudden impression made upon her of something new in her dear Lisbeth's appearance.

"My dear Lisbeth!" she exclaimed, "how pale and ill you look!"

"I am always pale," said Lisbeth.

"But, my love," protested Miss Clarissa, "you are pale, to-day, in a different way. You must be suffering. Dear! dear! How careless in us not to have remarked it before! I almost believe—nay, indeed, I am sure—that you look thin, actually thin!"

"I am always thin," said Lisbeth.

But Miss Clarissa was not to be consoled by any such coolness of manner. When she looked again more closely, she was quite sure that she was right, that her dear Lisbeth showed unmistakable signs of being in a dreadful state of health. She fell into a positive condition of tremor and remorse. She had been neglected; they had been heartlessly careless, not to see before that she was not strong. It must be attended to at once. And really, if Lisbeth had not been very decided, it is not at all unlikely that she would have been put to bed, and dosed, and wept over by all three spinsters at once.

"I hope it is not that Pen'yllan does not

agree with you," faltered Miss Hetty. "We always thought the air very fresh and bracing, but you certainly do not look like yourself, Lisbeth."

And the truth was that she did not look like herself. Much as she might protest against the assertion, she was thinner and paler than usual.

"I am not ill," she said, "whether I look ill or not. I never was better in my life. I have not slept very well of late; that is all. And I must beg you to let me have my own way about it, Aunt Clarissa. It is all nonsense. Don't fuss over me, I implore you. You will spoil Georgie's love story for her, and make Mr. Anstruthers uncomfortable. Men hate fuss of any kind. Leave me alone, when they are in the house, and I will take all the medicine you choose to give me in private, though it is all nonsense, I assure you."

But was it nonsense? Alas! I must confess, though it is with extreme reluctance, that the time came when the invincible was beaten, and felt that she was. It was not nonsense.

One afternoon, after sitting at her bedroom window for an hour, persuading herself that she was reading, while Georgie and Anstruthers enjoyed a *tête-à-tête* in the garden below, she

suddenly closed her book, and, rising from her chair, began to dress to go out.

She was down stairs, and out upon the beach, in five minutes; and, once away from the house, she began to walk furiously. She looked neither to right nor left, as she went. She was not in the humor to have her attention distracted from her thoughts by any beauty of sea, or sky, or shore. She saw the yellow sand before her, and that was all. She reached the old trysting-place, among the rocks, before she stopped. Once there, she gave herself time to breathe, and, standing still, looked back at the ground over which she had come. There was a worn-out expression in her face, such as the Misses Tregarthyn had never yet seen, even when they thought her at her worst. And yet, in a minute more, she smiled with actual grimness.

"I am being punished now," she said, aloud. "I am being punished now for everything I have ever done in my life. Now I begin to understand."

There was humiliation enough in her soul then to have made her grovel in the sand at her feet, if she had been prone to heroics or drama. Yes, she was beginning to understand. It was her turn now. Oh, to have come to this! To have learned this!

It was characteristic of her nature—an unfortunate nature at this time, passing through a new experience, and battling fiercely against it—that when, immediately afterward, the tears began to fill her eyes, and roll down her cheeks, they were the bitter, bitter tears of passionate mortification and anger. She could almost have killed herself, for very self-contempt and shame.

"What reason is there in it?" she said. "None. What has brought me to it? Nothing. Is he as worthy now as he was then? No! Isn't it sheer madness? Yes, it is."

She spoke truly, too. There was no reason in it. It was madness. He had done nothing to touch her heart, had made no effort to reach it. And yet he had reached and touched it. It would not have been like her to love a man because he was good, because he had made love to her; indeed, because of anything. Her actions were generally without any cause but her own peremptory fancies; and here, some strange, sudden caprice of emotion had been too much for her. How she had suffered since she discovered her weakness, no one but herself would ever know. She had writhed under it, burned under it, loathed it, and yet been conquered by it. Almost every blade of

Pen'yllan grass reminded her of some wrong she had done to the kindly, impetuous young fellow, who had loved her in the past. Almost every grain of Pen'yllan sand taunted her with some wanton selfishness, or cruelty, which must be remembered by the man who could have nothing but dislike for her in the present.

"I should be grateful now," she cried, bitterly. "Yes! Grateful for a tithe of what I once had under foot. This is eating dirt with a vengeance."

She might well frighten Miss Clarissa with her pallor and wretched looks. The intensity of her misery and humiliation was wearing her out, and robbing her of sleep and appetite. She wanted to leave Pen'yllan, but how could she suggest it? Georgie was so happy, she told herself, with a vindictive pleasure in her pain, that it would be a pity to disturb her.

She walked up and down the beach for half an hour before she returned home; and when she went her way, she was so tired as to be fairly exhausted. At the side door, by which she entered the house, she met Georgie, who held an open letter in her hand.

"Whom from?" asked Lisbeth, for lack of something to say.

"Mamma," was the girl's answer. "She

wonders when we are going home; but I am enjoying Pen'yllan so much——"

She paused, and blushed. Just lately it had occurred to her that it might be possible that Lisbeth misunderstood her relation to Hector, and something in Lisbeth's face made her stop and blush in this opportune manner.

"The weather is so lovely," she ended, "that I don't think I want to go yet."

Lisbeth smiled, but her smile was an abstracted sort of affair.

"No," she said. "We won't go yet. Pen'yllan is doing both of us good; and it is doing Mr. Anstruthers good, too. We won't go yet. Tell Mrs. Esmond so, Georgie."

And then she carried her absent smile up stairs.

CHAPTER XVI.

YES—TO LISBETH.

GEORGIE stood still, and looked after her. She blushed more deeply than ever. A queer distress and discomfort came upon her, and filled her mind. She had only wondered, before, if it was possible that Lisbeth did not know, did not wholly understand; but now the truth revealed itself in an uncomfortable flash of recognition.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, under her breath. "She does not see. She thinks—I am sure she thinks—" But she did not put the rest into words.

Pen'yllan, and the lovely weather, quite lost their charm for the moment. As she walked slowly down the hall, toward the parlor, holding her mother's letter in her hand, she would almost have been glad to run away. She remembered so many little peculiarities she had noticed in Lisbeth's manner, of late. She had managed to leave her alone with Hector so often; she had taken so many of those long walks by herself; she had not looked well; she

had sometimes been abstracted and restless. The girl's heart quite fluttered at the thought which all these things forced upon her. She was afraid to indulge in such a fancy. That day, when her confession had been made upon the beach, Lisbeth had confessed that she was sorry for her past cruelty. Could it be that her remorse had developed into a stronger feeling? Could it be that she was more than sorry now? That she was beginning to value the love she had thrown away, even to long for it? As I have said, the thought frightened Georgie a little. She had seen so much to admire in Hector Anstruthers, that she had often wondered, innocently, how it was possible that Lisbeth could have resisted his numerous charms and perfections. How, indeed, could any woman whom he loved be so hard to please as not to appreciate him? She, herself, had appreciated him, she told herself, blushing, even though he had not loved her at all as he had loved Lisbeth. And yet she felt now as if it would be almost dreadful to think that Lisbeth, cool, self-controlled Lisbeth, had given way, in spite of her coolness and self-control. And then, if this was the true state of affairs, how much more dreadful it became to feel that she was misunderstood; that Lisbeth saw in

her a rival. Something must be done, it was plain, but it was a difficult matter to decide what the something should be. Ah! if it had only been a matter she could have talked over with mamma, who knew everything, and could always advise her. But it was Lisbeth's secret —Lisbeth's and Hector's; and so she must be loyal to her trust.

She was quite sad, in the midst of her labyrinth, all the afternoon; so sad, that when Anstruthers came in from the village, to partake of Miss Clarissa's tea, he marked the change in her at once. But he was in a gloomy mood himself; so it is not to be wondered at that the small party around the table was not nearly so gay as usual. Lisbeth had a headache. Her eyes were heavy, and she said but little, and disappeared as soon as the meal was at an end.

Georgie would have followed her at once, but in the hall Hector stopped her.

"Come into the garden, Georgie," he said; "I have something to say to you."

"Very well," said Georgie, "as soon as I have asked Lisbeth to come, too."

"But," he returned, "I do not want Lisbeth. What I have to say I must say to you, not Lisbeth."

Georgie had been standing with one foot on the lowest stair, and her hand on the balustrades, but a tone in his voice made her turn round, and look up questioningly. He was pale and haggard. She saw in an instant that he was not quite himself. A little pain shot through her tender heart. How unhappy he looked!

"You are very pale, Hector," she said, pityingly.

He tried to smile, but it was a constrained effort.

"I suppose I am nervous," he answered. "Be good to me, Georgie, my dear." And he held out his hand to her. "Come," he said, "Lisbeth does not care for our society much. She always avoids us when she can."

Georgie's face fell. Had he seen it, too?

Then surely it must be true that Lisbeth did avoid them.

She was so full of her trouble about Lisbeth, that it scarcely occurred to her mind that he had made a very simple request, in an unusual way. She did not even ask herself what he could be going to say, that he would not say before Lisbeth.

But she became more conscious of the strangeness of his mood every moment. He

hardly spoke half a dozen more words, until they reached their usual seat, under the laburnum. There, when she sat down, he flung himself upon the grass, at her side, in his favorite unceremonious fashion; but for a minute or so, he did not even look at her. She had never thought him boyish before, but just then the thought entered her mind, that he was very boyish indeed, and she began to pity and wonder at him more and more.

Suddenly he turned toward her and spoke.

"Georgie, my dear," he said, his voice quite trembling, "I am going to ask you for that great gift, of which I am so unworthy."

What need that he should say another word? She knew quite well, then, what he meant, and why it was that he had not wanted Lisbeth. And, ready as she usually was with her blushes, she did not blush at all. She even lost all her bright color at once, and confronted him with a face quite pale and altered.

"You may go on, Hector," she said; "I will listen."

So he broke out hurriedly and desperately, and poured forth his appeal.

"I don't know how I dare ask so much," he said. "I don't know how I dare speak at all.

You do not understand what my life has been. God forbid that you should! But what is left of it is not worthy of you, Georgie—the sweetest, purest woman that God ever made. And yet I think it is because I honor you so much, that I dare to throw myself on your mercy. I want to be a better man, my dear, and—and—will you help me? You see what I am asking you for, Georgie?" And he bent his pale face over her hand, kissing it as some sad penitent might kiss a saint's.

A strange love-making, indeed! The girl gave a little sob. Yes, actually, a little sob. But she let him hold her hand, just as she had let him hold it, that day before. She had put her budding love aside, and outlived it bravely; but there was a pang in this, nevertheless, and she could not help but feel it. It would be over in a moment, but it stung sharply, for the instant.

"Yes, Hector, I see," she answered, almost directly. "You are asking me if I will marry you."

"Yes, my dear." And he kissed her hand again.

Then there was a silence, for a little while; and he waited, wondering and feeling, God knows what strange hope, or fear, at heart. At

length, however, another fair, small hand was laid softly on his, causing him to glance up, questioningly.

"Is that the answer?" he ventured, with a new throb of the heart.

But she shook her head, smiling a sweet, half-sad smile.

"It is not *that* answer," she said, "but it is an answer in its way. It means that I am going to speak to you, from my heart."

"I think you always do that," he said, unsteadily.

"Yes, always; but now, more than ever, I must be very true to you, indeed, to-day, because—because you have made a mistake, Hector."

"A mistake! Then it is not the first."

But what a craven he felt at soul! How hard it was to meet her clear, bright eyes!

"You have made a mistake," she went on. "Oh, if I was not true to you, and to myself as well, your whole life might be a mistake from this hour, and everything might go wrong. You fancy that, because you can admire and trust me, that you could learn to love me, too, in that best way, as you do not now, when I was your wife. But you could not, however hard you might try, and however hard I might

try, too ; you could not. You could only teach yourself a poor imitation of that best way, and you would be unsatisfied at heart, Hector; and so should I. Husbands and wives ought to have that best kind of love, and nothing else, because nothing else will fill its place—the place in their hearts that God made to be filled by it. Because you are honest and true to me," with a warm grasp of the small hand, though warm tears were in her eyes, "you do not say that you have that kind of love to offer me, and I know you have not. I think that, perhaps, you could not give it to me, even if—don't be angry, Hector, because I could not help seeing it—you had not given it, almost in spite of yourself, to some one else——"

"To some one else!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she said, sorrowfully, "to Lisbeth."

He drew his hands away, and covered his face with them, with something like a groan of despair.

"I am answered," he said. "Don't say anything more, Georgie. That is enough."

"Don't misunderstand me," cried the girl. "You could not help it. How could you? The old love never died out, really. And now, when you see her so much better, and more

beautiful, how could it be otherwise than that it should spring into new life, and be stronger than ever? It is Lisbeth you love, Hector, and she is worthy of your love—of anybody's love, if you would only understand her rightly. Is it pride that holds you back from showing your heart to her, or is it because, even though you love her, you have not forgiven her for your old misery? Tell me."

"Do I love her," he asked, "or hate her?"

"You love her," answered Georgie.

"And yet," he said, gloomily, "I have asked you to marry me, and you have answered me, as gently as an angel might have done."

"It was only that you made a mistake," said the girl.

"A mistake!" he echoed. "Ay, it was a mistake! And, as I said, it is not the first I have made. My life has been full of blunders."

"Oh!" said Georgie, "how I wish I was wise enough to know how to set them right. If you would only trust me and let me try."

He gave her a mournful smile.

"I thought there was a way," he said, "but you did not agree with me."

"I knew better," shaking her head, and coloring. "And perhaps I was too proud

and jealous. I am not so good as you think me. I am very fond of you, but not fond enough to take your half-loaf. Let us forget it altogether."

CHAPTER XVII.

GOOD-BY.

SURELY, so serious a question was never so dismissed in so short a time. For these few busy moments, the matter was as completely disposed of, as if they had spent hours in arguing it. He scarcely knew how it was that he felt so sure that he need say no more; that the brave, simple, pretty Georgie had set his poor, weak plans aside so easily, and yet so tenderly. Much as he admired and reverenced her, there was a depth in her girlish nature which he had never sounded. It was all over for him with Georgie Esmond, though he need not fear that her friendship would ever waver.

"If I was only wise enough to help you," she repeated; "if you would only trust me, and let me try."

"If any one could help me, you could," he said, "but there is no help for me."

He had never once admitted to himself that this miserable passion could ever make him happy. It had never occurred to his mind that its termination would be anything but a

wretched and humiliating one. As Georgie had suggested, he loved, but had not forgiven, and he told himself that his love was degraded infatuation. What was there to tie to in such a feeling? Did he trust the woman to whom he was in secret a slave? No, he trusted her no more to-day than he had done before. But she had a hold upon his heart-strings, nevertheless. The old witchery was exercising its full power upon him. It had been so strong, at last, that he had been maddened into making this coward's effort to free himself. If Georgie would stretch out her hand, she might save him a fatal weakness, and so, even while he despised himself for his selfish folly, he had resolved to throw himself upon Georgie's mercy. And here was the end of it! Georgie was wiser than himself, clearer of sight, truer of soul, stronger, with a brave simplicity; and she had proved to him what a shameful folly it was. Georgie would have none of him; and yet how sweet she was, God bless her!

"I shall leave Pen'yllan, in the morning," he said. "There is nothing to keep me here now, since you do not want me. Say that you forgive me, Georgie, and we will bid each other good-by, for the present."

"You must not think that I have anything to

forgive," she answered; "but I do not say that you will be wrong in going. I believe it will be best. You do not quite understand yourself yet. Go away, and give yourself time to find out, whether you can conquer your heart, or not. The time will come when you will know."

"And then?" somewhat bitterly.

"Something will happen, I think," her simple faith in the kindness of Fortune asserting itself. "I cannot believe that you will always be as unhappy as you are now. One of you will be sure to do or say something that will help the other."

A sudden color leaped to his face. Her words held a suggestion of which he had never once thought, and which set his pulses beating hard and fast.

"What?" he exclaimed, his new feeling giving him no time to check himself. "You do not think the time will ever come, when she—when she might feel, too——"

"I think," said the girl, in a grave, almost reverent voice, "I think the time has come now."

When they returned to the house, Lisbeth, seeing them from the parlor window, made a mental comment.

"Judging from his face," she observed, "I should say that he had asked her to marry him, and had been accepted. Judging from hers, I should say her answer had been 'No.' You are not easy to read, for once, Georgie. What does it mean?"

Georgie came into the house, with a more composed look than her face had worn for several days. She laid her garden hat upon the hall table and walked straight into the parlor to her dear Lisbeth. She had a very shrewd idea that her dear Lisbeth knew nothing of their guest's intended departure, and she wanted to be the first to break the news to her. It would not matter if any little secrets were betrayed to herself. So she went to the window, and laid her hand on Lisbeth's shoulder.

"Did Hector tell you that he was going?" she asked, as if his having done so would have been the most natural thing in the world.

"That he was going?" repeated Lisbeth.

Georgie gazed considerately out into the garden.

"Yes. Back to London, you know—to-morrow. I suppose he thinks he has been idle long enough."

Lisbeth shrugged her shoulders.

"Rather sudden, isn't it?" she commented. "I think you have been the first to hear the news."

"Gentlemen always do things suddenly," remarked Georgie, astutely.

She had no need to have been so discreet. Lisbeth had been very cool under the information. An indifferent observer might have easily concluded that she cared very little about it; that her interest in Hector Anstruthers' going and coming was an extremely well-controlled feeling. When he came into the room himself, a few minutes later, she was quite composed enough to touch upon the subject with polite regrets.

"Aunt Clarissa will positively mourn," she ended, with one of her incomprehensible smiles. "She has been almost radiant during your visit." And there her share in the matter seemed to terminate. She said nothing when the three old ladies, hearing the news, poured forth affectionate plaints, from the first course at dinner until the last. She listened composedly, without remark, though once or twice she looked at Georgie with rather an interested air. It was her turn to feel curious now, and she was curious enough. Georgie blushed when she was looked at scrutinizingly, but her

manner was decidedly not that of a girl who had just accepted a lover.

"And," said Lisbeth, examining her coolly, "she would not refuse him. She must be fond of him; and if she is fond of him, she is too sweet-natured and straightforward to coquet with him. And yet—well, it is decidedly puzzling."

She found the evening rather a bore, upon the whole. How was it that it dragged so, in spite of her efforts? She thought it would never come to an end. When, with long-suffering good-nature, Hector drew out the chess-table, and challenged the delighted Miss Clarissa to a game, her patience fairly gave way. She turned to the piano for refuge, and sang song after song, until she could sing no more. Then, when Georgie took her place, she made a furtive exit, and slipped out through the hall and a side door into the garden. What made her turn her steps toward Miss Clarissa's rose-thicket? She did not know. But she went there. There she had bidden her boy-lover good-by, and broken his heart; there she had sung her little song to Georgie and Hector. On both occasions it had been warm, and balmy, and moonlight; and now it was warm, and balmy, and moonlight again. She stood and looked through

the trees, catching silvery glimpses of the sea. In a minute or so she moved her hand in an impatient gesture.

"I am sick of it all," she cried, breaking the silence. "I am sick of the whole world, and of myself more than the rest. How I wish I was like Aunt Clarissa."

She began to wander about restlessly, pulling at the roses with no particular object, but because she could not keep still. Buds and blossoms, red, and cream, and white, were torn from their stems ruthlessly, until her hands were full, and then she stopped again, half wondering at herself.

"What am I thinking of?" she said. "What do I want them for? Poor things!" remembering her parable bitterly. "They might have been very sweet to-morrow."

She held the cool, fresh things close up to her face, breathing in their fragrance eagerly; and when she took them away, their blossoms were bright here and there—perhaps with dew; certainly with dew, if it was dew that wet her fevered cheeks, and softened her eyes so strangely.

Scarcely three minutes later she turned with a start, and then stood listening. Some one had left the house, and was coming across the

lawn toward her. She waited a few seconds, to make sure that she was not mistaken, and then she bent down over a bush, and began leisurely to gather more roses, though she was overloaded already.

"Where is Georgie?" she asked, calmly, of the intruder, when he reached her side.

"Georgie," returned a rather constrained voice, "is talking to Miss Hetty. Miss Clarissa sent me here to remind you that the dew is falling, and that you are not strong enough to bear the night air.

"Miss Clarissa is very good," Lisbeth answered. "And so are you. But dear Miss Clarissa has been threatening me with an untimely grave, as the result of night air, ever since I was six months old; so, perhaps, I am not so grateful as I ought to be. I love darkness rather than light, upon the whole, and don't find that it disagrees with me; perhaps because my deeds are evil."

"Perhaps," dryly.

For fully two minutes, she gathered her flowers in silence, while Anstruthers waited, and looked at her; but at last she stood upright, and their eyes met.

"It is a beautiful night," she remarked, sententiously.

"Yes.'

"We have had a great number of lovely nights, lately."

"Yes."

She busied herself with her roses for a little while, to the exclusion of everything else, and then she gave it up.

"Well," she said, "suppose we go into the house. I can do nothing with them here. The fact is, I don't know why I gathered them, unless it was from an impulse of destructiveness. Let us go."

"Stop a moment," he said; nay, almost commanded her.

She paused, not seeming in the least disturbed, however. She would have cut off her right hand, almost, before she would have exhibited an emotion.

"I had a reason of my own for coming here," he went on, "apart from Miss Clarissa's commands. I want to bid you good-by."

"You must be going," she commented, "very early in the morning." And yet her heart was beating like a trip-hammer.

"It is not that," was his reply, "though I am going early. I had a whim—you remember my whim about the song—a fancy that I

should like to say my good-by here, where I said a good-by once before."

"It is easily said," answered Lisbeth, and held out one of her hands. "Good-by."

He took it, with a pretense at a coolness as masterly as her own, but he could not keep it up. He gave way to some swift, passionate, inexplicable prompting, and in an instant had covered it with kisses, had even fiercely kissed her slender wrist.

She snatched it from his grasp, breathless with anger, forgetting her resolve to control herself.

"What do you mean?" she cried. "You are mad. How dare you?"

He drew dack a step, confronting her defiantly.

"I do not know what I mean," he answered, "unless, as you say, I am mad. I think I am mad; so, being a madman, I will not ask you to pardon me. It was a farewell. It is over now, however. Will you let me take your roses, and carry them to the house?"

She vouchsafed him no answer, but turned away, and left him to follow, if he chose. Her helplessness against him drove her fairly wild. Nothing she could say, or do, would ever wipe out the memory of those mad kisses. He

either loved or despised her utterly; and remembering his manner toward Georgie, she could only conclude that he despised her, and had offered her a deadly insult. The blood shot into her cheeks, like a rush of fire, and her eyes blazed ominously.

"My dear Lisbeth," bleated good little Miss Clarissa, the moment she saw her, "you have caught fresh cold, I am convinced. You are in a high fever."

Fever, indeed! She had never been in such a fever in her life; but it was a fever of anger and humiliation.

"I think it probable," she said, seriously, "that I am going to have measles, or scarlatina, Aunt Clarissa. Which would you prefer?"

Georgie came up stairs, long after she had shut herself in her room, to find her sitting by the open window, looking worn out and wretched.

"Lisbeth," she ventured, "is it possible that you *are* going to be ill?"

Probably Georgie Esmond had never been so spoken to in her life, as she was when her dear Lisbeth turned upon her at this simple remark.

"Georgie, my dear," she said, "if you ask

me such a question again, I believe I shall turn you out of the room, and lock the door."

Georgie regarded her for a moment in mute amazement; but after that she managed to recover herself.

"I—I beg pardon, Lisbeth," she faltered, and then discreetly turned her attention to the performance of her nightly toilet, preparatory to going to bed.

But in the morning, it was Lisbeth to whose share the meekness fell. Her mood had changed altogether, and she was so astoundingly humble, that Georgie was alarmed.

"You have more patience with me than I have with myself, Georgie," she said, "or I should know it was not worth my while to say a word to you. Do have pity on me. I—well, I was out of sorts, or something. And I have such a horrible temper."

Really, her demon might have departed from her that night. She showed no more temper; she became almost as amiable as a more commonplace young woman. She made so few caustic speeches, that the Misses Tregarthyn began to fear that her delicate health had affected her usual flow of spirits; and accordingly mourned over her in secret, not feeling it discreet to do so openly.

"She used to be so spirited," sighed Miss Hetty, over her sewing, to Georgie. "Don't you observe an alteration in her, my love? Sister Clarissa, and sister Millicent, and myself really do not know what to think. It would be such a comfort to us, if she could only be persuaded to see Dr. Puddifoot. He is such a dear man, and so extremely talented."

"Because I have been trying to behave myself decently, they think I am ill," said Lisbeth, smiling a little mournfully. "Just think how I must have treated them, Georgie. They are so used to my humors, that, if I am not making myself actively unpleasant, they fancy it is because I have not the strength to do it. If I were to snub Aunt Hetty, and snap at Aunt Clarissa, I believe they would shed tears of joy."

CHAPTER XVIII.

YOU THINK I HAVE A SECRET.

A WEEK or so after Anstruthers' departure Georgie decided that her visit must come to an end. Mamma was not so very well, and poor papa had a touch of his old enemy, the gout; and, really she had been away from home a long time. Did not Lisbeth think that they had better return to London, even though Pen'yllan was still as delightful as ever?

Then they had a surprise indeed.

Lisbeth, who had been listening, in a rather absent manner, aroused herself to astonish them.

"I think," she said, "that if you do not mind making the journey alone, Georgie, I should like to stay in Pen'yllan this winter."

"In Pen'yllan?" cried Georgie. "All winter, Lisbeth?"

"At Pen'yllan? Here? With us?" cried Miss Millicent, and Miss Hetty, and Miss Clarissa, in chorus.

"Yes," answered Lisbeth, in her most non-committal fashion. "At Pen'yllan, Aunt

Hetty. Here, Aunt Millicent. With you, Aunt Clarissa."

The Misses Tregarthyn became quite pale. They glanced at each other, and shook their heads, ominously. This portended something dreadful, indeed.

"My love," faltered Miss Clarissa.

"What?" interposed Lisbeth. "Won't you let me stay? Are you tired of me? I told you that you would be, you know, before I came."

"Oh, my dear!" protested Miss Clarissa. "How can you? Tired of you? Sister Hetty, sister Millicent! Tired of her?"

"We only thought, my love, that it would be so dull to one used to—to the brilliant vortex of London society," ended Miss Millicent, rather grandly.

"But if I think that it will not," said Lisbeth. "I am tired of the 'brilliant vortex of London society.'"

She got up from her chair, and went and stood by Georgie, at the window, looking out.

"Yes," she said, almost as if speaking to herself, "I think I should like to stay."

The end of it was, that she did stay. She wrote to Mrs. Despard, that very day, announcing her intention of remaining. Georgie, in

packing her trunks, actually shed a few silent tears among her ruffs and ribbons. To her mind, this was a sad termination to her happy visit. She knew that it must mean something serious, that there must be some powerful motive at the bottom of such a resolution. If Lisbeth would only not be so reserved. If it was only a little easier to understand her.

"We shall miss you very much, Lisbeth," she ventured, mournfully.

"Not more than I shall miss you," answered Lisbeth, who at the time stood near, watching her as she knelt before the box she was packing.

Georgie paused in her task, to look up doubtfully.

"Then why will you do it?" she said. "You —you must have a reason."

"Yes," said Lisbeth, "I have a reason."

The girl's eyes still appealed to her; so she went on, with a rather melancholy smile:

"I have two reasons—perhaps more. Pen'yllan agrees with me, and I do not want to go back to town yet. I am going to take a rest. I must need one, or Aunt Clarissa would not find so much fault with my appearance. I don't want to 'go off on my looks,' before my time, and you know they are always telling

me I am pale and thin. Am I pale and thin, Georgie?"

"Yes," confessed Georgie, "you are," and she gave her a troubled look.

"Then," returned Lisbeth, "there is all the more reason that I should rusticate. Perhaps, by the spring, I shall be red and fat, like Miss Rosamond Puddifoot," with a little laugh. "And I shall have taken to tracts, and soup-kitchens, and given up the world, and wear a yellow bonnet, and call London a 'vortex of sinful pleasure,' as she does. Why, my dear Georgie, what is the matter?"

The fact was, that a certain incongruity in her beloved Lisbeth's looks and tone, had so frightened Georgie, and touched her susceptible heart, that the tears had rushed to her eyes, and she was filled with a dolorous pity.

"You are not—you are not happy," she cried all at once. "You are not, or you would not speak in that queer, satirical way. I wish you would be a little—a little more—kind, Lisbeth."

Lisbeth's look was a positively guilty one.

"Kind!" she exclaimed. "Kind, Georgie!"

Having gone so far, Georgie could not easily draw back, and was fain to go on, though she became conscious that she had placed herself in a very trying position.

"It is not kind to keep everything to yourself so closely," she said, tremulously. "As if we did not care for you, or could not comprehend——"

She stopped, because Lisbeth frightened her again. She became so pale, that it was impossible to say anything more. Her great, dark eyes dilated, as if with a kind of horror, at something.

"You—you think I have a secret," she interrupted her, with a hollow-sounding laugh. "And you are determined to make a heroine out of me, instead of allowing me to enjoy my 'nerves' in peace. You don't comprehend 'nerves,' that is clear. You are running at a red rag, Georgie, my dear. It is astonishing how prone you good, tender-hearted people are to run at red rags, and toss, and worry them."

It was plain that she would never betray herself. She would hold at arm's-length even the creature who loved her best, and was most worthy of her confidence. It was useless to try to win her to any revelation of her feelings.

Georgie fell to at her packing again, with a very melancholy consciousness of the fact, that she had done no good by losing control over her innocent emotions, and might have

done harm. It had pained her inexpressibly to see that quick dread of self-betrayal, which had announced itself in the sudden loss of color, and the odd expression in her friend's eyes.

"She does not love me as I love her," was her pathetic, mental conclusion. "If she did, she would not be so afraid of me."

When Lisbeth bade her good-by, at the little railway station, the girl's heart quite failed her.

"What shall I say to mamma and papa?" she asked.

"Tell them that Pen'yllan agrees with me so well that I don't like to leave it for the present," was Lisbeth's answer. "And tell Mrs. Esmond that I will write to her myself."

"And—" in timid desperation—"and Hector, Lisbeth?"

"Hector?" rather sharply. "Why Hector? What has he to do with the matter? But stay!" shrugging her shoulders. "I suppose it would be only civil. Tell him—tell him—that Aunt Clarissa sends her love, and hopes he will take care of his lungs."

And yet, though this irreverent speech was her last, and she made it in her most malicious manner, the delicate, dark face, and light, small

figure, had a strangely desolate look to Georgie, as, when the train bore her away, she caught her last farewell glimpse of them on the platform of the small station.

Lisbeth stood before her mirror, that night, slowly brushing up her hair, and feeling the silence of the small chamber acutely.

"It would never have done," she said to herself. "It would never have done at all. This is the better way—better, by far."

But it was hard enough to face, and it was fantastic enough to think that she had really determined to face it. In a minute or so she sat down, with her brush in her hand, and her hair loose upon her shoulders, to confront the facts once more. She was going to spend her winter at Pen'yllan. She had given up the flesh-pots of Egypt. She was going to breakfast at eight, dine at two when there was no company, take five o'clock tea, and spend the evening with the Misses Tregarthyn. She would stroll in the garden, walk on the beach, and take Miss Clarissa's medicines meekly. At this point a new view of the case presented itself to her, and she began to laugh. Mustard baths, and Dr. Puddifoot's prescriptions, in incongruous connection with her own personal knowledge of things, appeared all at once so

ludicrous, that they got the better of her, and she laughed until she found herself crying; and then, angry as she was at her own weakness, the tears got the better of her, too, for a short time. If she had never been emotional before, she was emotional enough in these days. She could not pride herself upon her immovability now. She felt, constantly, either passionate anger against herself, or passionate contempt, or a passionate eagerness to retrieve her lost self-respect. What could she do? How could she rescue herself? This would not do! This would not do! She must make some new struggle! This sort of thing she was saying feverishly from morning until night.

Secretly she had almost learned to detest Pen'yllan. Pen'yllan, she told herself, had been the cause of all her follies; but it was safer at present than London. If she stayed at Pen'yllan long enough, surely she could wear herself out, or rather wear out her fancies. A less resolute young woman would, in all likelihood, have trifled weakly with her danger; but it was not so with Lisbeth. She had not trifled with it from the first: she had held herself stubbornly aloof from any little self-indulgence; and now she was harder upon herself than ever. She would have died cheer-

fully, rather than have betrayed herself, and if she could die, surely she could endure a dull winter.

Her moral condition was so far improved, however, that she did not visit her small miseries upon her aunts, as she would have done in the olden days. Her behavior was really creditable, under the circumstances. She played chess with Miss Clarissa in the evening, or read aloud, or sung for them, and began to take a whimsical pleasure in their delight at her condescension. They were so easily delighted, that she felt many a sting of shame at her former delinquencies. She had an almost morbid longing "to be good," like Georgie, and she practiced this being "good" upon the three spinsters, with a persistence at which she herself both laughed and cried when she was alone. Her first letter to Georgie puzzled the girl indescribably, and yet touched her somehow. She, who believed her beloved Lisbeth to be perfect among women, could not quite understand the psychological crisis through which she was passing, and yet could not fail to feel that something unusual was happening.

"I take Aunt Clarissa's medicine with a mild regularity which alarms her," the letter announced. "She thinks I must be going into a

consumption, and tearfully consults Dr. Puddifoot in private. The cook is ordered to prepare particularly nourishing soups for dinner, and if my appetite is not something startling, everybody turns pale. And yet all this does not seem to me as good a joke as it would have done years ago. I see another side to it. I wonder how it is that they can be so fond of me. For my part, I am sure I could never have been fond of Lisbeth Crespigny."

CHAPTER XIX.

AND THAT WAS THE END OF IT.

THE roses fell, one by one, in Miss Clarissa's flower beds, and so at last did the palest autumn-bloom; the leaves dropped from the trees, and the winds from the sea began to blow across the sands, in chilly gusts. But Lisbeth stayed bravely on. Rainy days dragged by wearily enough, and cold ones made their appearance, but she did not give up even when Mrs. Despard wondered, and Georgie implored in weekly epistles. The winter routine of the Tregarthyn household was not exciting, but it was a sort of safeguard. Better dullness than something worse! Perhaps, in time, by spring, it might be different. And yet she could not say that she found her state of mind improving. And as to her body—well, Miss Clarissa might well sigh over her in secret. If she had been pale and thin before, she had not gained flesh and color. She persisted in her long walks in desperation, and came home after them, looking haggard and hollow-eyed. She wandered about the garden, in self-defense, and was no less tired. She followed Dr. Puddi-

foot's directions to the letter, and, to the Misses Tregarthyn's dismay, was not improved. In fact, as that great man, Dr. Puddifoot, observed, "Something was radically wrong."

It was an unequal, miserable-enough struggle, but it had its termination; and, like all such terminations, it was an abrupt, unexpected, almost fantastic one. Lisbeth had never thought of such an end to her self-inflicted penance. No such possibility had presented itself to her mind. It was not her way to romance, and she had confined herself to realities.

Sitting at her bedroom window, one chill, uncomfortable December day, she arrived at a fanciful caprice. It was as raw and miserable a day as one would, or rather would not, wish to see. The wind blew over the sea in gusts, the gulls flew languidly under the gray sky, a few dead leaves swirled about in eddies in the road, and yet this caprice took possession of Lisbeth, as she looked out, and appreciated the perfection of desolateness. Since Georgie had left Pen'yllan, she had never once been near the old trysting-place. Her walks had always been in the opposite direction, and now it suddenly occurred to her, that she would like to go and see how things would look in her present mood. In five minutes from the time the

fancy seized her, Miss Clarissa caught a glimpse of something through the parlor window, which made her utter an exclamation:

"Lisbeth!" she said. "Out again, and on such a day! Dear me! I do trust she is well wrapped up."

Lispeth made her way against the damp, chill wind, with a touch of positively savage pleasure in her own discomfort. The sands were wet, and unpleasant to walk on; and she was not sorry. What did it matter? She was in the frame of mind to experience a sort of malicious enjoyment of outward miseries. The tryst looked melancholy enough when she reached it. She made her way to the nook, behind the sheltering rocks, and stood there, looking out to sea. She had not expected to find the place wearing its summer aspect, but she was scarcely prepared to face such desolateness. Everything was gray—gray tossing sea, gray screaming gulls, gray lowering sky.

"It would have been better to have stayed at home," she said.

Still she could not make up her mind to turn back at once, and lingered a little, leaning against a rock, shivering, and feeling dreary; and so it was that the man who was approaching first caught sight of her figure.

Lisbeth did not see this man. She did not care to see either man or woman, at present. The gulls suited her better than human beings, and she believed herself to be utterly alone, until footsteps upon the sand, quite near, made her turn with an impatient start.

The man—he was not a yard from her side—raised his hat and stood still. The man was Hector Anstruthers.

For a moment neither uttered a word. Lisbeth thought her heart must have stopped beating. She had turned cold as marble. When she could control herself sufficiently to think at all, she thought of Georgie.

"What is the matter?" she exclaimed. "Is somebody ill? Georgie?"

"Georgie is quite well," he answered.

Then he came close, and held out his hand, with a strange, melancholy smile.

"I ask pardon for alarming you," he said. "I ask pardon for coming without an excuse; but I have no excuse. Won't you shake hands with me, Lisbeth?"

She got through the ceremony as quickly as possible, and then drew back, folding her shawl about her. She was shivering with something, besides cold. If she had only been safe at

home. If nobody was in danger, what on earth had he come for?

"I was a little startled," she said. "Pen'yllan is not very attractive to people, as a rule, in winter, and it seemed the most natural thing that Georgie was ill, and had sent you to me." Then, after a little pause, and a sidelong glance at him, "You look as if you had been ill yourself."

He certainly did. He was thin, and haggard, and care-worn. His eyes were dangerously bright, and he had a restless air. He was not so sublime a dandy, either, as he had been; there was even a kind of negligence about him.

"Aunt Clarissa must have been very much alarmed when she saw you," Lisbeth proceeded, trying to get up a creditable smile.

"I have not seen Miss Clarissa," he answered. "I came here first."

This was so ominous, that Lisbeth succumbed. She knew, when he said this, that he did not intend to keep up appearances. But she made one more poor effort.

"Then, perhaps, we had better go home," she remarked.

"No," he returned, quickly. "I have something to say."

She felt herself losing strength. But what did it matter, let him say what he would? Perhaps it was something about Georgie. She had a dreary feeling that she was ready for anything.

"Go on!" she said.

"Oh!" he cried, in bitter, impatient resignation of her stoicism. "Arm yourself against me; I know you will do that. Sneer at my folly; I am prepared for that, too. But I shall speak. It is Fate. I am a fool, but I must speak."

"Was it to say this that you came here?" interposed Lisbeth.

"I came because I could not stay away. You are my Fate, I tell you," almost angrily. "You will not let me rest. When I kissed your hands, that last night, I gave myself up to my madness. I had tried to persuade myself that I had no love for you; but that cured me, and showed me how I had deceived myself. I have never ceased to love you, from the first; and you——"

His words died upon his lips. She looked as he had never seen her look before. She leaned against the rock, as if she needed support. Suddenly her eyes and lashes were wet, and she began to tremble slightly. He checked

himself, full of swift remorse. What a rough brute he was!

"Don't!" he said. "I did not mean to frighten you."

She lifted her eyes, piteously; her lips parted, as if she was going to speak; but she did not speak. She was even weaker than she had thought. She had never been so helpless and shaken before. She shrank from him, and drooping her face upon the rock, burst into hysterical tears.

He did not pause to ask himself what it meant. He did not understand women's nerves. He only comprehended that she had given way, that everything was changed, that she was unstrung and weeping. In a moment he had her in his arms, exclaiming, passionately:

"Lisbeth! Lisbeth!" And then the little straw hat, with its blue ribbon, slipping away from the small, pale face, that lay upon his breast, he bent and covered it, this small, pale, tear-wet face, with reckless kisses.

For the moment he did not care what came next, nor what doom he brought upon himself, he was so mad with long pent-up love and misery. He found the little hand under the shawl, too, and fell to kissing that, also, and would not let it go.

"Don't be cruel to me, Lisbeth!" he pleaded, when she tried to draw it away; and she was forced to let it remain. "Don't be cruel to me," he said, and still held this hand, when she released herself at last, and stood up, miserable and shame-faced, yet far less miserable than she had been.

"It—it is you who are cruel!" she faltered. "What am I to say to you! You have left me nothing to say."

She hung back, half afraid of his vehemence. He had begun with bitter ravings, and in five minutes had ended by crushing her in his arms. It was her punishment that she should be so humbled and brought down.

"Say nothing," he cried. "Let me say all. I love you. It is Fate."

She could not help seeing the fantastic side of this, and she smiled, a little, daring smile, though she hung her head.

"Are you—proposing to me?" she ventured, hoping to retrieve herself.

He could not stand that, but she would not let him burst out again, and leave her no chance to assert her privilege to struggle at retaining the upper hand.

"You told me that you came in spite of

yourself, because you could not stay away. Was it true?" she asked.

"Yes."

She could not help feeling a glow of triumph, and it shone in her eyes.

"I am glad of that," she said. "I am glad. It saves me so much."

"And I may stay?" he exclaimed, in his old, impetuous fashion. "Lisbeth——"

Though he held her hand fast, she managed to stoop down, under pretense of rescuing the blue-ribboned hat from the sand.

"You need not go," she answered.

And that was the end of it.

The three Misses Tregarthyn looked at each in blank dismay, when these two walked into the parlor, an hour after. But Hector grasped his nettle with a matter-of-fact boldness, for which Lisbeth intensely admired him in secret.

"I went out on the beach to find Miss Crespigny, and I found her," he announced. "Here she is, Miss Clarissa, Miss Millicent, Miss Hetty! She has promised to marry me. Oblige us with your blessing."

The trio fell upon their beloved Lisbeth, and embraced, as they had done on the previous occasion; but this time she bore it better.

That night Lisbeth sat up until one o'clock,

writing a long letter to Georgie Esmond, and trying, in a strangely softened and penitent mood, to be open and straightforward for once.

"I am going to marry Hector Anstruthers, and try to be better," she wrote. "You know what I mean, when I say 'better.' I mean that I want to make Lisbeth Anstruthers a far different creature from Lisbeth Crespigny. Do you think I ever can be a 'good' woman, Georgie—like you and your mother? If I ever am one, it will be you two whom I must thank." And as she wrote this, she shed not unhappy tears over it.

"Perhaps," she said, "Love will make me as tender as other women."

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